

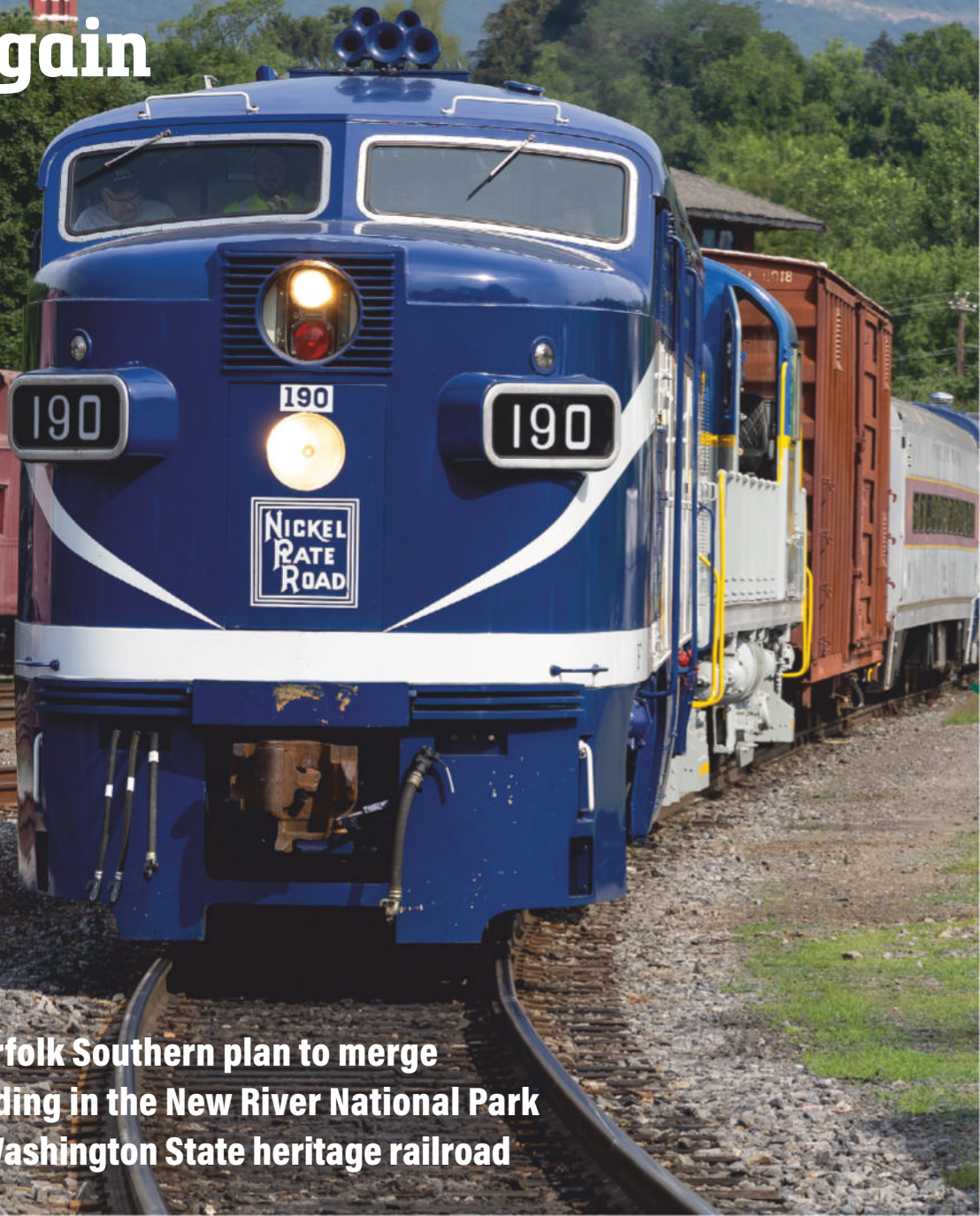
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October 2025

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From the Editor



Carl Swanson

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The dynamic nature of the railroad industry is on full display in this month's issue.

A proposed merger between Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern is fueling debate and making headlines. If it comes to pass, it would create a coast-to-coast railroad. If that happens would a BNSF-CSX merger be far behind? Sweeping changes may be in the offing. Turn to News, page 4, for the story.

Change is also the theme of Bob Johnston's feature on Chicago Union Station's 100th anniversary, which starts on page 30. As Bob writes, revision and renovation have been constants in the station's long history and more changes are on the drawing board.

In railroading, standing still means falling behind.

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Trains (ISSN 0041-0934, USPS 529-850) is published monthly by Firecrown Media Inc., 405 Cherry Street, Chattanooga, TN 37402. Periodicals postage paid at Chattanooga, TN and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Trains, PO Box 850, Lincolnshire, IL 60069.



Union Pacific seeks merger with Norfolk Southern

\$85 billion deal would create 52,000-mile, coast-to-coast company

▲ The proposed merger of Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern could bring Big Boy No. 4014 and NS AC44C6M No. 4087, meeting near Livonia, La., in August 2021, into the same family. Steve Smedley

UNION PACIFIC'S HISTORIC \$85 billion deal to acquire Norfolk Southern and create the first U.S. transcontinental railroad likely will set off a final wave of railroad mergers.

The merged company — to be called Union Pacific and based in Omaha, Neb. — will transform the U.S. supply chain and economy, strengthen domestic manufacturing, and preserve all union jobs, the railroads said in their July 29 announcement.

"Railroads have been an integral part of building America since the Industrial Revolution, and this transaction is the next step in advancing the industry," says UP CEO Jim Vena, who will lead the combined system.

If the deal gains regulatory approval, the railroad will stretch 52,215 route miles, with track winding through 43 states from the East Coast to the West Coast and serving around 100 ports. Based on 2024 data, the

combined railroad would generate \$36 billion in revenue, handle 15.3 million carloads and intermodal shipments, have 52,023 employees, and a locomotive roster of 9,301 units.

Executives touted the merger as a way to return to volume growth after losing market share to the highway since rail traffic peaked in 2006.

"We can only go so far independently. ... We've been losing share to truck — and this is one way to reverse that trend," NS CEO Mark George says.

The combination will unleash growth by eliminating problematic interchanges, speeding and simplifying service, and enabling the railroad to tap the so-called watershed markets along the Mississippi River, executives said.

UP and NS envision \$1.75 billion in growth-related revenue by the third year of their merger, along with \$1 billion in cost and productivity savings.

UP and NS currently exchange about 1 million shipments per year and are each other's largest interchange partners. Single-line service will reduce strain on gateways such as Chicago and Memphis, end inefficient cross-town rubber-tire intermodal interchanges, and allow customers to receive rate quotes and bills from one railroad rather than two. It also will enable the railroad to reduce intermediate car handlings.

"In the future, those million carloads will immediately see a 24- to 48-hour improvement in their transit time," Vena says. "That combination of faster service and greater market reach is powerful, making our transcontinental railroad an attractive choice for both current and future customers."

The transcontinental system's traffic opportunities include providing seamless service from coast to coast — and most places in between —

for intermodal, finished vehicles, food and beverage, chemicals, and steel shipments.

The merger also would open up service in the nation's midsection. The watershed area, spanning a few hundred miles east and west of the Mississippi River, is a no-man's land for Class I systems. It's not well-served by rail today due to the short hauls for the eastern or western carrier, or both. "When you're going from west of it to east, or east to west, rail is never even contemplated because it's just too much hassle, too much extended time, and frankly, too much cost," George says. "So these are the areas where we see tremendous growth."

Executives expressed confidence their deal could gain regulatory approval. The UP-NS combination will be the first judged under the Surface Transportation Board's 2001 merger review rules. The rules require a merger of Class I railroads to enhance competition — not merely preserve it — and to be in the public interest.

Most analysts expect that widespread reciprocal switching, which allows sole-served shippers to receive access to a second railroad, will be required for regulatory approval. The railroads also will have to win over shipper groups and some rail labor unions, which initially said they would oppose further rail consolidation. The merger review process could take up to two years.

Railroad mergers in the modern era have had one thing in common: Widespread service problems that occur while meshing operations and information tech-



With UP and NS pursuing merger, will BNSF and CSX follow? CSX SD70ACe No. 4836, ES44AC No. 777 sit next to BNSF C44-9W No. 5242 at Mills Yard in Brunswick, Md., in 2012. Chris Eads

nology systems. Trouble after the mega mergers of the 1990s prompted the STB to impose a merger moratorium while it drew up new review rules.

"A transaction of this size and scope won't be easy to execute. We understand that," Vena says. The railroad will maintain an adequate buffer of locomotives and train crews to be able to better respond to service issues, he says.

"We're very aware of what led to the merger moratorium back in the 2000, 2001 time frame, and it was just a bunch of bad integrations," George says. "And we are committed to make sure that doesn't hap-

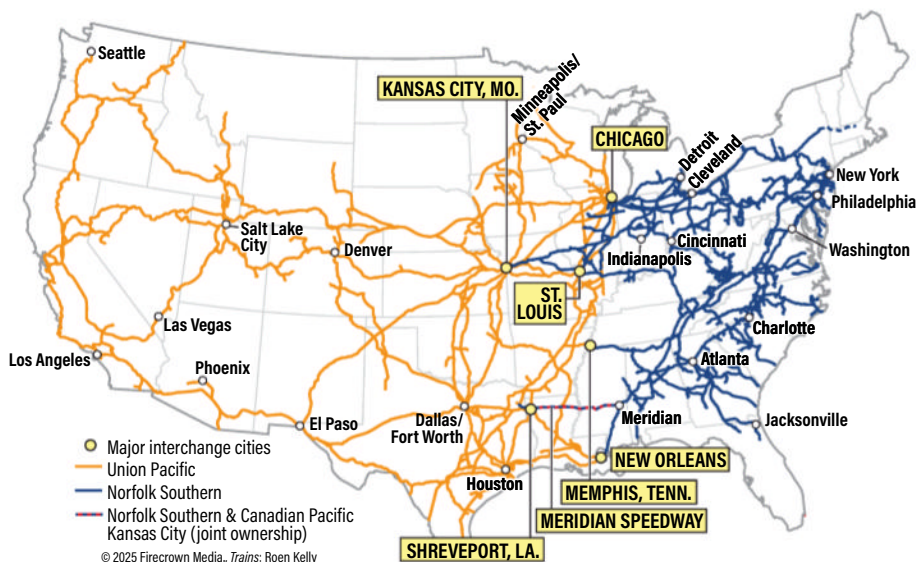
pen in this case."

The UP-NS colossus will dwarf the independent BNSF and CSX systems — and put them under tremendous pressure to respond. Neither railroad would comment on the UP-NS deal. But it is widely expected that a first transcon will spark a second.

How the response unfolds is uncertain. BNSF's parent company, Berkshire Hathaway, has a nearly \$350 billion cash stockpile it could tap to fund an acquisition. Will BNSF bid for NS, either seeking it as a merger partner or to merely force UP to pay a higher purchase price? Will BNSF seek a merger with CSX right away? Or will it seek concessions as part of the UP-NS merger, then wait to see if regulators approve UP-NS? If UP-NS gets the green light, BNSF would then be able to make a deal with CSX while knowing regulatory approval would be a slam dunk.

The historic nature of the UP-NS combination was not lost on Vena. He invoked President Abraham Lincoln, who created the Union Pacific in 1862 with the signing of The Pacific Railroad Act. "This combination is transformational ... it's a win for the American economy, it's a win for our customers, and it's a win for our people," he says. "It builds on President Abraham Lincoln's vision of a transcontinental railroad from nearly 165 years ago." —Bill Stephens

A combined Union Pacific-Norfolk Southern system would span more than 52,000 miles and offer multiple ways to avoid bottlenecks in Chicago and elsewhere.



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CN plans to end use of part of former BC Rail

Plan announced to 'decommission' more than 200 miles of north of Squamish, B.C.,

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAY HAS ANNOUNCED its intention to end operations on 214 miles of former BC Rail tracks north of Squamish, British Columbia, that it began leasing from the province in 2003.

The scenic interior route from North Vancouver to a connection with CN's Prince Rupert line at Prince George, B.C., hosts seasonal Rocky Mountaineer "Rainforest to Gold Rush" excursions to and from Jasper, Alta. A 20-mile segment south of Lillooet, B.C., is also utilized by a First Nations organization that operates twice-daily railbus service.

As first reported by the *Squamish Chief* newspaper, CN issued a three-year plan to the provincial government in July outlining its intentions to "decommission" tracks it leases from just north of Squamish, about 39 miles from North Vancouver, to a point south of Exeter, B.C., in the 100 Mile House area. It would retain lease rights



RDC service between North Vancouver and Prince George was a hallmark of BC Rail. Passenger operations ended in 2002; CN leased the line the next year. Bob Johnston



Former BC Rail C40-8M No. 4625 leads a Canadian National train through Cheakamus Canyon north of Squamish, B.C., on Feb. 24, 2018. CN plans to end operation on the route. Matthew Robson

north another for 206 miles to Prince George and beyond. The railroad has not been operating through freights regularly over the route for several years.

Regulations require the railroad to within a year "publicly advertise the availability of the line or any operating in it for sale, lease, or other transfer for continued operations." At this early stage, it is unclear whether any operator will step up to take over operations or track maintenance, although a member of the provincial parliament told the *Chief* the move was "an exciting development" for possible passenger rail expansion. If no company makes an offer to operate the line, some suggest the right-of-way could be turned into a trail.

Rocky Mountaineer will continue to operate its seasonal, three-day excursions between North Vancouver and Jasper through 2026, but spokeswoman Nicole Ford said the company is "determining what this means for our longer-term operations in the region." The weekly round trips make overnight stops at Whistler and Quesnel, B.C.

Tracks from Squamish to Quesnel were completed in 1921 by the Pacific Great

Eastern Railway, and later extended south to North Vancouver and up to Prince George by the 1950s, when passenger service utilizing Budd RDCs began over the entire route. Renamed BC Rail, the province-owned, passenger-friendly management also operated Royal Hudson steam excursions, a dinner train out of North Vancouver, and the luxury *Whistler Northwind* train between North Vancouver and Prince George beginning in 2001. But BC Rail ended all passenger service in October 2002, and the province leased the railroad to CN the following year.

After other passenger service had ended, a railcar shuttle continued between Lillooet and Seton Portage to give area residents an option in place of an hour-long highway trip. Today, a converted school bus operates twice daily on the route of the *Tsalalh Seton Train*, calling at schools and grocery stores on Lillooet streets before lowering flanged wheels to run on tracks to Seton Portage, where it terminates off-rail at a restaurant and pub. A representative of the shuttle operator said their agreement calls for that service to continue indefinitely. — Bob Johnston

BNSF makes moves to boost carload traffic

Push involves a faster merchandise network, more local service, and stronger shortline ties

BNSF RAILWAY CARRIES more intermodal, coal, and grain traffic than any other railroad. Now it's looking to boost its relatively small carload network through improved service, more frequent customer switching, and tighter partnerships with its top short line connections.

"We know intermodal's a big part of the growth future. We've developed the ag shuttle network on the bulk side, and we certainly like our bulk network," BNSF Chief Marketing Officer Tom Williams said in a recent interview. "I don't want it to be lost that we care very much about that single-car merchandise network, too."

Over the past year BNSF has taken steps to improve efficiency of its merchandise network, starting with pushing down terminal dwell at its hump yards and emphasizing on-time train departures.

Those efforts paid off: BNSF posted all-time best terminal dwell figures in May 2025. For the second quarter, terminal dwell was 21.9 hours, a 17% improvement compared to the second quarter of 2024.

And — bucking the long-term industry trend — BNSF has increased service frequency for 225 of its merchandise customers. A carload facility that received three days of service per week, for example, might now see a BNSF local on its spurs five days a week. Some five-day-per-week customers, meanwhile, went to daily service.

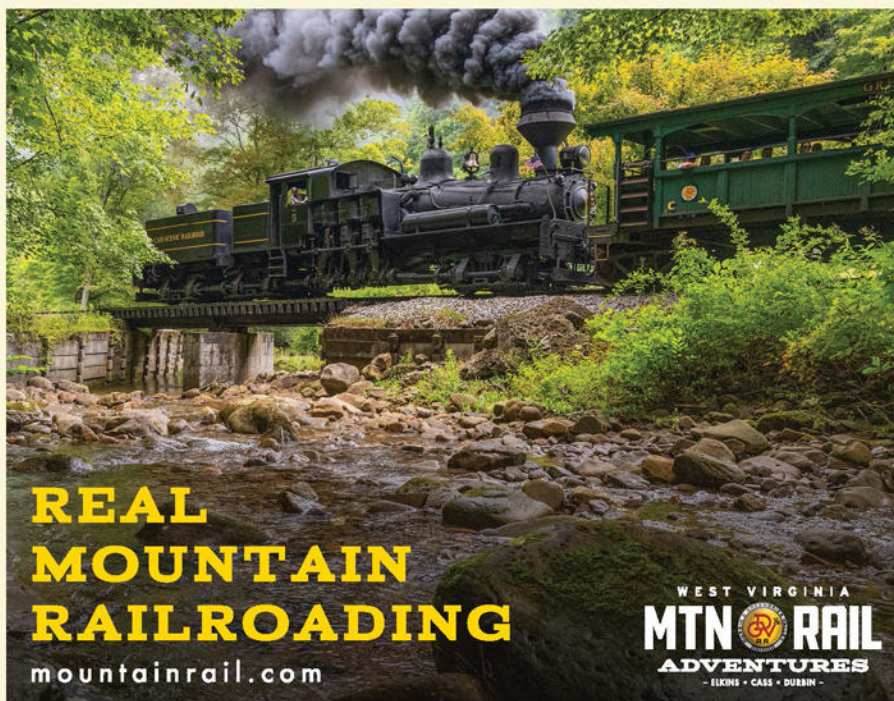
Williams says that adds up to about 21,000 additional service days per year. The hope is the more frequent local service will lead to volume growth once the industrial economy rebounds.

The railway's Shortline Select program, rolled out last fall to improve interchange performance, has cut dwell nearly in half on participating short lines. Volume on the Shortline Select railroads is up around 5% this year, compared to flat volumes on other short line connections as well as the balance of BNSF's merchandise business.

The combination of more efficient terminals and more frequent local service helps cars spin faster from origin to destination and return. Car-miles per day are up 25% compared to a year ago, which shaves two

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A Family Railroad Fun Guide



BNSF is working to boost carload business, represented by the Yarley/Parkwater terminal in Spokane, Wash., in April 2016. Bruce Kelly

days off transit for a car moving 1,000 miles.

What this means is that customers can move the same amount of freight using fewer cars — or put their suddenly surplus cars to work hauling more freight. “It’s good for us, it’s good for the customers,” Williams says. “We’ve reduced the inventory year over year by 20%.”

Amid these improvements, BNSF in June introduced a new First Mile/Last Mile group that includes the 13 people from its Shortline Development and Industrial Products Business Development teams.

Their focus is on understanding the needs of merchandise customers. “This isn’t about us going to the customer and telling them this is our network and ... you fit it or you don’t,” Williams says. Rather, BNSF wants to collaborate with carload customers, learn how rail fits into their supply chains, and how local service tweaks could better fit their needs and lead to growth, he explains.

Shortline Select aims to tighten the commercial relationship with top connecting railroads. Participating lines include Genesee & Wyoming’s Alabama & Gulf Coast Railway, Burlington Junction Railway, Genesee & Wyoming’s Portland & Western Railway, TNW Corp.’s Texas Northwestern Railroad and Red River Valley & Western, and Watco’s Timber Rock Railroad.

Last year BNSF handled 2.43 million merchandise carloads, a figure that does not include coal or grain.

“Interchanging more than 260,000 carloads per year, G&W and BNSF have an outstanding partnership. Having two G&W railroads — Alabama & Gulf Coast Railway in the east and Portland & Western Railroad in the west — participate in the BNSF Shortline Select program is a natural step in the evolution of our relationship,” says Kimberly Thompson, a vice president of sales and marketing at G&W.

The next step in BNSF’s merchandise growth efforts will be improving the technology tools that customers use to interact with the railroad, Williams says. Customers should see improvements rolled out over the next six to 18 months. — *Bill Stephens*

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CASCADES COMPLETION The Washington State Department of Transportation provided a look at the first completed Amtrak Cascades trainset before it departed the Siemens factory in Sacramento, Calif., for testing in Pueblo, Colo. The equipment maintains the evergreen, crème, and mocha color scheme unique to the Cascades; images released also provide a look at the new café car and the exterior and interior of a business-class coach. WSDOT says the first of the trains is expected to enter service in 2026. Four photos, WSDOT



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NEWS BRIEFS

Heartland Flyer gets funding reprieve

AMTRAK'S HEARTLAND FLYER, facing elimination after the Texas legislature did not provide annual funding in the two-year state budget passed in May, received a one-year reprieve. The Regional Transportation Council of the **NORTH CENTRAL TEXAS COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS** voted to provide \$3.5 million to fill the funding gap. The emergency commitment is intended to provide time for the legislature to address additional funding. Texas and Oklahoma sponsor the train between Fort Worth and Oklahoma City, which was launched in 1999. Right: The *Heartland Flyer* passes new GE locomotives testing near Krum, Texas, in 2016. David Lassen



AMTRAK announced it had reached a settlement in its dispute with **UNION PACIFIC** over the handling of the *Sunset Limited*, and asked the **SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD** to end its investigation into the matter. Few details were released, but Amtrak said in a filing with the STB that UP "has made commitments regarding the *Sunset Limited*'s customer on-time performance and has further agreed to consequences if it does not meet those commitments."

Activist investor **ANCORA HOLDINGS**, which led a proxy fight for control of **NORFOLK SOUTHERN** in 2024, said it has increased its ownership share in CSX, raising the possi-

bility it could push for management changes. **ANCORA ALTERNATIVES** President James Chadwick noted the company's operating ratio has increased under CEO Joe Hinrichs, and is now the highest among the five publicly traded Class I railroads. Asked on CNBC if Ancora would push for management changes, Chadwick said, "Whatever actions they make from here will dictate what we do."

The **FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION** revoked \$4 billion in funding to the **CALIFORNIA HIGH-SPEED RAIL AUTHORITY**, saying the agency had not met terms of the grant awarded during the Biden Administration. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy blamed the authority's "mismanagement and incompetence," as well as the state's Democratic political leadership. The CHSRA

filed suit, with Gov. Gavin Newsom calling the move political retribution "motivated by President Trump's personal animus toward California and the high-speed rail project, not by facts on the ground."

The federal **CYBERSECURITY & INFRASTRUCTURE SECURITY AGENCY** issued a warning that vulnerability in end-of-train devices could allow an attacker to take control of a train's air brake system, suddenly halting trains and possibly leading to a derailment. There have been no known attempts to exploit the issue. The **ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN RAILROADS** said it is working on improving security as it introduces new technology and is working with the cybersecurity agency and **DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY** on mitigation strategies for existing equipment.

Shortline holding company **JAGUAR TRANSPORT HOLDINGS** filed paperwork with the **SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD** on a plan to purchase two short lines, the 80-mile **CENTRAL WASHINGTON RAILROAD** near Yakima and the 86-mile **COLUMBIA BASIN RAILROAD** southwest of Spokane. The acquisitions would give the company 13 railroads. It is subject to approval by **BNSF RAILWAY**, which previously owned the trackage used by the two lines and has a right-of-first-refusal clause if the railroads change hands.

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More single-line service would boost intermodal

Schneider's cross-border volume surges thanks to riding CPKC from Mexico to Chicago



Bill Stephens
bybillstephens@gmail.com
Analysis: Trains.com

A stat in a Schneider news release caught my eye: Overall cross-border intermodal volume between the U.S. and Mexico was up 17% last year. Impressive, yes. But what jumped off the screen was Schneider's growth rate. Its cross-border traffic — which rides Canadian Pacific Kansas City's flagship Mexico Midwest Express hotshots — grew twice as fast.

Schneider has been doing business in Mexico for more than three decades. How on earth, you ask, can the guys with the orange containers all of a sudden outperform the rest of the industry so significantly?

The answer is single-line service. Thanks to the 2023 merger of Canadian Pacific and Kansas City Southern, Schneider and its customers can use one railroad between Chicago and points in Mexico, including Monterrey, San Luis Potosi, and Mexico City. The Schneider boxes previously relied on BNSF and KCS interline service.

"Schneider's robust cross-border growth is driven by several converging factors. One of the most significant is the advantage of single-rail service with CPKC, which delivers exceptional speed, reliability, and security," says Michael Baumgardt, Schneider's senior vice president of intermodal. "These benefits have made it easier than ever for customers to shift freight from truck to intermodal."

Also contributing: Schneider's Mexico expertise and the ongoing near-shoring of production to Mexico, Baumgardt says. Yes, of course. But the real story here is single-line service that had not existed between the U.S. and Mexico aside from KCS's limited

reach to Houston and Kansas City. Now CPKC and Schneider can tap the big freight flows between Mexico and Chicago.

Schneider's single-line service growth is not a one-off. In fact, it's another piece of evidence showing how much intermodal customers prefer a one-railroad move.

Consider that only one out of every seven intermodal loads runs in interline service. No man is an island, but railroads practically are when it comes to intermodal.

A glance at the relationship involving Class I railroad maps, lengths of haul, and domestic intermodal market share tells the tale. Intermodal analyst Larry Gross, in his July Intermodal In Depth report, points out that intermodal market share peaks in two lengths of haul: 751 to 1,000 miles and 2,001 to 2,500 miles.

These mileage brackets match the maximum runs on the Big Four U.S. systems, with the shorter figures in the East (CSX, Norfolk Southern) and the longer in the West (BNSF, Union Pacific).

Domestic intermodal's market share falls off a cliff when interchange is required, even though the long hauls should be in rail's wheelhouse. Domestic share is 42% lower in the 1,001-2,000 mile range and 21% lower above 2,500 miles, Gross estimates.

The inescapable conclusion here is that intermodal customers prefer single-line service. This should not come as a surprise: In every end-to-end merger, railroads have argued that single-line service should produce market share gains.

CPKC was no exception. Skeptics scoffed at CPKC's cross-border route, which wanders all over the map between Laredo, Texas, and Bensenville, Ill. And yet look at Schneider's growth rate.

Now imagine that on a broader scale. Union Pacific CEO Jim Vena, who reached a merger deal with Norfolk Southern, says a transcon merger will be a game changer: "You change the whole paradigm discussion with trucks on the highway versus what comes to the railroad." He's right.

Gross estimates, based on market share data, that U.S. domestic intermodal volume would grow as much as 25%, or 3 million loads annually, with single-line service from coast to coast.

Some of the Class I CEOs contend that conventional partnerships can achieve the benefits of mergers without the regulatory baggage. The dismal interline intermodal data suggests otherwise.

But Gross says there's more than one way to skin a cat. An alternative to merger, he says, would be creating an intermodal company akin to Triple Crown, whose RoadRailer network once spanned the divide between East and West. Triple Crown sold the service and contracted with the railroads to handle its dedicated trains. All the Class I's had to do was hook and haul.

This much is clear: If railroads want to see outsized intermodal growth, it won't come from business as usual. It will come from more single-line service. **I**



CPKC intermodal train No. 181 (San Luis Potosi, Mexico to Bensenville, Ill.) is seen at Genoa, Ill., on Nov. 18, 2023. Daniel Fredrickson

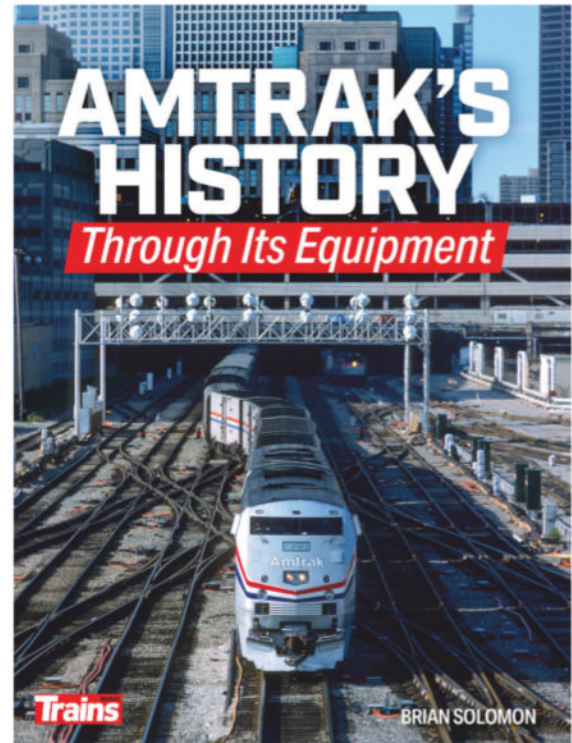
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Steamtown redux

The railroad-themed national park is at a crossroads

▲ As a new superintendent takes the helm, Steamtown National Historic Site in Scranton, Pa., remains one of the most significant railroad preservation efforts on the continent, but its full potential has yet to be realized.

Scott A. Hartley

THIRTY YEARS AFTER its grand opening as a unit of the National Park Service, Steamtown National Historic Site in Scranton, Pa., is at a crossroads.

Whether you admire or disdain it, know nothing about it, or simply hope for its survival, it remains a significant railroad preservation effort. Steamtown has the potential to expand the ways we think about railroad heritage and could redefine the ways future generations understand how railroad mobility helped shape America.

Or it could be left to wither by a federal agency under great stress, with hundreds of NPS units competing for diminishing resources while dealing with increasing demands. No one has yet described the situation in such stark terms. But to me, the risks look all too real.

TIME FOR A RESET

The present moment seems particularly ripe for a reset. It has been almost 70 years since Steamtown took shape as a

concept and project, and 40 years since its authorization as a National Historic Site. In a rapidly changing world, an occasional course correction is not just prudent — it may mean long-term survival.

We should be clear about a few basic realities. Steamtown is a unit of the National Park Service, and has to conform to the NPS mission and process. Its audience is not the 150,000 serious railroad enthusiasts, but 340 million Americans.

NPS administers 433 wildly diverse sites and parks with a staff of roughly 18,000 full- and part-time employees. If it were a railroad, it would rank with the Class I in complexity.

Steamtown is one of five railroad-focused sites nestled within that vast NPS enterprise. The others are Golden Spike National Historical Park, celebrating the completion of the Pacific railroad; Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site, which is primarily railroad archaeology; Pullman National

Historical Park in Chicago; and Cuyahoga Valley National Park, which hosts a partner's excursion operation. Another half-dozen NPS units have some kind of railroad component.

Steamtown, with its varied program of railroad operations, is part of a very small cohort. As such, it does not fit easily into the usual NPS categories, never has, never will. It isn't exactly an orphan, but the very nature of railroad heritage preservation and operations introduces multiple challenges that NPS policy and procedures are not well-equipped to handle.

Steamtown recently welcomed a new superintendent — its sixth, not counting a few in interim capacities. My strong impression is that Jeremy Komasz is the right person at the right time with the right skills. The superintendent of Steamtown does not need to be a railroad expert or historian. The ability to lead, administrative savvy, open-mindedness, and courage are more important.

Komasz comes from “the outside” — specifically, the U.S. Navy and defense industry. He continues to serve as a SEAL and is a captain in the Naval Reserves. His degree from The George Washington University is in International Relations with a minor in History. I imagine his M.A. from the Naval War College in Strategic Studies, and his experience with tribal relations in Afghanistan will help him negotiate the sometimes tribal world of railroad preservation.

The military, railroading, and the National Park Service share a strong sense of mission, and understand strategy, tactics, logistics, and process. Less remarked upon are parallel traditions of accommodations, work-arounds, and ways to make rules work in your favor. The goal is not to avoid or subvert the NPS process, but to compliment Steamtown’s work with the help of volunteers, colleague institutions, and its Official Philanthropic Partner, the Iron Horse Society.

WHAT NEXT?

There is no “best way” to address how Steamtown’s future unfolds. I’m certain NPS has its priorities, and Komasz brings both military and corporate approaches to visioning, planning, and strategy. Still, I’d like to think that lessons and insights from our particular branch of cultural resource management — Train World — will be part of the mix.

Let’s start with a pause, review, exploration of options, and perhaps restart on a better basis. This review might develop a clear understanding of what Steamtown can, and cannot, do as an NPS unit. That would be coupled with an outline what the site would like to do — short-and long-term objectives, needs, wants, deficiencies, and so forth.

A Dutch uncle would suggest that Steamtown acknowledge it is part of many other relevant communities, and pay more attention to colleague institutions — especially in history of industry and technology, railroad preservation,

and heritage operations. NPS, and many of its sites, tend to be inwardly focused and seemingly aloof. Komasz has already begun the kind of outreach that, to my knowledge, none of his predecessors seriously undertook. I’d like to think we will reciprocate.

There will be some heavy lifting, but all of us — the National Park Service, the railroad heritage community, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the region, and even potential visitors — have a great deal to lose if we can’t help SNHS regain its footing and boost its visitation.

We can do many things to encourage Steamtown’s renaissance. First, we simply need to accept Steamtown as it is now, not what we think was promised four decades ago. Those were vastly different times, and reality outran good intentions. At some point it does no good to nitpick, complain of deficiencies, or critique without contributing something as well.

Visits are always in order. Joining the Iron Horse Society is substantive and helpful. Better yet, let your Senator or Representative know you appreciate NPS efforts to conserve and present the story of American railroading. We all know how important grease is to squeaky wheels. We need to squeak more.

Celebrate the fact that the National Park Service regards railroad heritage as part of our nation’s heritage. Steamtown will never be the country’s largest or most important railroad site or collection, but it can punch far above its weight.

A NEW ERA?

What do we, as a large and diverse community of railroad interests, think Steamtown should aspire to become?

That may seem like an amusing thought experiment but good ideas tend to rise to the top, and gradually gain traction. Collectively, Train World has thousands of years of experience presenting our slice of the American Experience to all sorts of audiences.

It is in our best interest to



Out of service since 2010, Canadian Pacific 4-6-2 No. 2317 poses in low-angle sunlight at Steamtown National Historic Site while visitors record their encounter with railroading’s past. National Park Service

help Steamtown reach as many people as possible with the most interesting and persuasive messages we can devise. It is a safe bet that whatever good works come out of a rejuvenated Steamtown will be useful at other railroad sites.

Now also would be a fine time for a symposium to assess the overall state of railway heritage and preservation, and where it might be in 10 or 20 years. We did that sort of thing years ago, and accomplished a lot. Zoom will not do.

Railway heritage, NPS, and Steamtown share many broad concerns, such as how to engage young people. How do we train future generations in the often-arcane ways of traditional railroad work? At the other extreme, every operator of steam locomotives in the country — including NPS — comes under the same strict regulatory regime. As they were at the California State Railroad Museum and Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, a gathering at Steamtown would offer context, examples, and the chance to build relationships.

It’s also time to revisit Steamtown’s own mission. NPS has changed, as have Steamtown’s many audiences.

The academic fields of railroad history, history of technology, and American cultural history have matured greatly and offer a large and sophisticated set of tools. A symposium at Steamtown, about Steamtown and the future of railroad heri-

tage, is overdue.

Why not envision Steamtown as a presentation of American railroading, but in the larger, richer context of America’s First Industrial Revolution? Make it an integrated account of how railroad mobility, coal, and iron made it possible to settle the continent and create great cities. Nothing Steamtown has done would be wasted — but its opportunities for growth and relevance (and new resources) would expand considerably.

With a more comprehensive and coherent agenda, we can legitimately ask other people (industries, agencies, foundations, interest groups) to share some of the costs.

In any event, we have to start somewhere, and a new superintendent from a different cut of cloth is an excellent next step. No single leader can revive an institution the size of Steamtown by himself, or even with the small — but capable — staff he has to work with. We should be careful not to expect too much too soon. But I also have a hunch that whatever the job throws at him, Komasz will find a way over, around, or through it.

Our mission, should we choose to accept it, is to put the past behind us and think creatively about what could happen. While we can’t change anything that unfolded in the last 40 years, we absolutely can do things differently in the next 40. — *John P. Hankey*

STEAM CAB RIDE ON MT. RAINIER



A day in the life of a Washington State heritage railroad

By Lou Maxon
photos by Radford Creative

After months of logistics, scheduling, and signing on the legal waiver's dotted line, I pulled up to the Mt. Rainier Scenic Railroad and Museum in Mineral, Wash. to take a ride in the cab of a steam locomotive. I'd experienced the thrill and nostalgia of steam as a passenger but never from a locomotive cab. I felt I'd reached the pinnacle of railroading.

I'd visited Mt. Rainier's extensive rail campus at Mineral years ago to enjoy a "Rails and Ales" excursion, but this was my first behind-the-scenes access to the operation.

I was dressed for the part from head-to-toe, including a pair of railroad-style bib overalls, although I admit my outfit noticeably lacked the well-used patina of the bibs worn by the crew.

Bethan Maher, the railroad's executive director, introduced the crew and showed me around the shop. If you share the same deep respect I have for the craftsmanship involved in heritage railroading, you'll understand how this felt like Willy Wonka giving me a tour of his chocolate factory.

A DAY OF FIRSTS

Polson Logging Co. No. 70, a 2-8-2 Mikado built by Baldwin in Philadelphia in 1922, would power our run today. This would be a day of firsts for the crew. We were joined by an employee who had worked his way up from running rail cycles to brakeman, and today marked his initiation as conductor for the day's first passenger run. Another first was our steam fireman in training, a high school senior from Chehalis, Wash., who was training under the mentorship of a seasoned rail employee.

Steam railroading isn't just for old equipment and old-timers. The average staff and volunteer age is 28. There is a youth movement in heritage railroading, and



Author Lou Maxon dressed for his cab ride in new bib overalls. He notes, "my outfit noticeably lacked the well-used patina of the bibs worn by the crew."

◀ The author experienced steam railroading from the cab of the Mt. Rainier Scenic Railroad's Polson Logging Co. No. 70, a 2-8-2 Mikado built by Baldwin in Philadelphia in 1922.

Mt. Rainier's future was riding with us today.

Speaking of old-timers, our *Trains* crew consisted of myself and two friends serving as volunteer photographers. Collectively, we had zero operating experience and no business being anywhere near the cab of a historic steam locomotive. But here we were. When you love trains, dreams don't age out.

ENTER THE ANALOG WORLD

We gathered for the safety meeting, and then the crew dispersed to prep the Mikado. Rowdy Pierce, a long-time Mt. Rainier employee and a railroader since his youth, took the engineer's seat and started preparing for the run. Our departure from Mineral was timed for an 11 a.m. arrival at Elbe, Wash., where we would pick up the first ticketed passengers of the day.

Steam locomotives are a reminder to appreciate the analog nature of railroad history. Steam doesn't want you in a hurry, can be temperamental, requires surgical expertise, a bit of luck, and a hint of superstition. On the other hand, Pierce said, anything related to railroading built before 1941 seems to work just fine, while anything built more recently is equally certain to be failure-prone.

A successful day on the rails, he added, is a boring one, with anything and everything going as planned with no surprises.

Soon we were immersed in the pre-departure routine — safety checks, fine-tuning the steam locomotive, monitoring the gauges, tending to the boiler, and feeding the fire.

Besides the expected sights of varying amounts of steam breathing out from the locomotive there is a mechanical sound-track filling the air — some incredibly high-pitched and some at varying cadences. After a while we began to figure out the patterns

A behind-the-scenes tour of the Mt. Rainier's steam shop included a locomotive boiler in the process of being rebuilt. The grid markings serve as a reference to each area of the boiler.



Master of a 100% analog world, Rowdy Pierce, Mt. Rainier's superintendent, takes the throttle of No. 70.

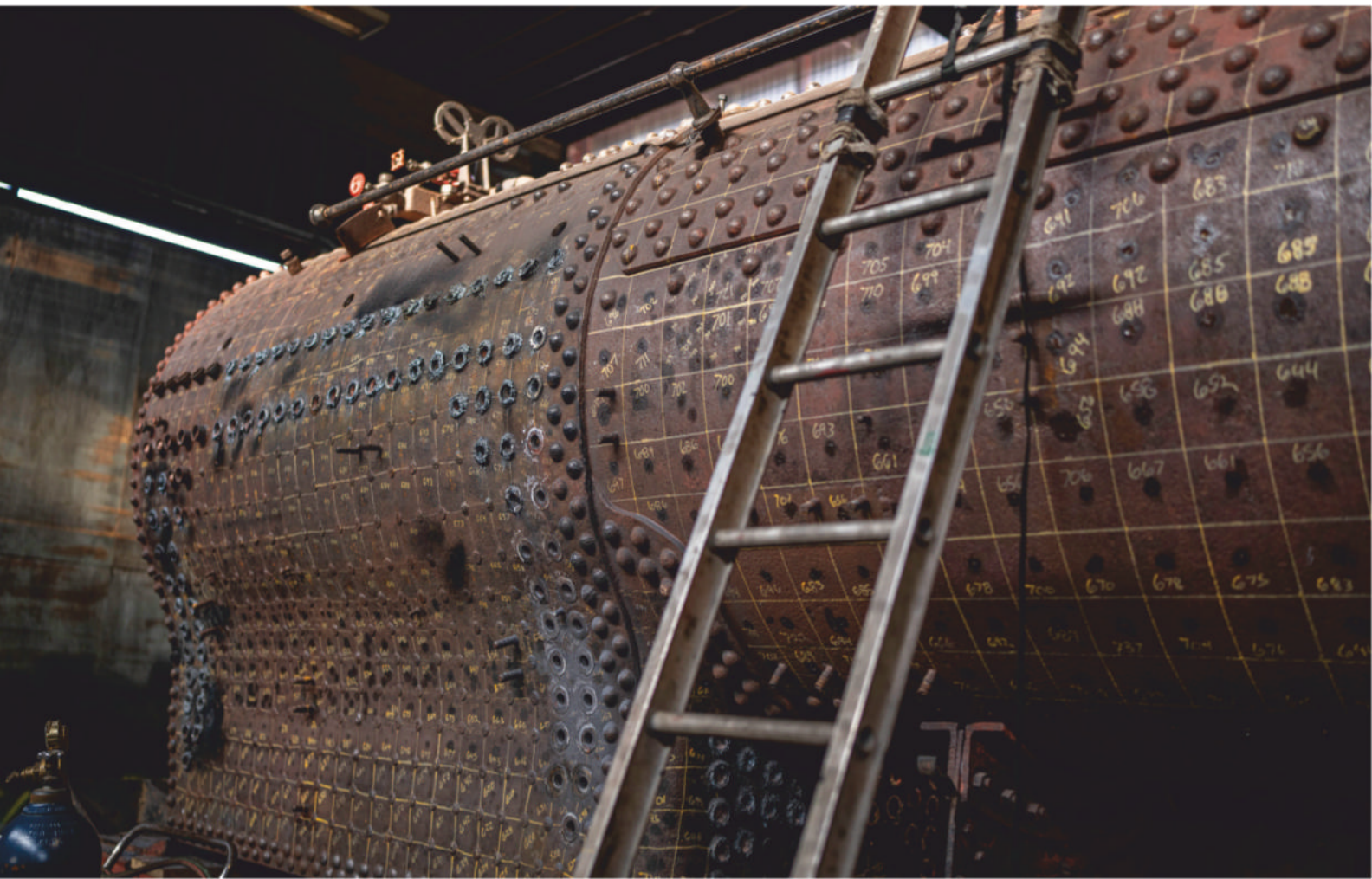
and know when to cover our ears. All of this considerable activity took place before we pulled out of Mineral on our run to Elbe.

The cab of the Polson Logging locomotive is not spacious and we were five packed into a 1922 sardine can. There are raised seats for the fireman and the engineer. Our fireman's mentor stood on watch and provided direction. A small steel bench backed up to the tender.

A steam train is the antidote to all things digital. The locomotive's operation is 100% analog. Levers, handles, and a whistle controlled by a pull of a rope.

After the all-clear from various members of the crew, it was time to pull out of the yard. The radio announced the highball signal and we went from stationary hours of preparation to full-steam ahead out of Mineral en route to the Elbe, Wash. depot where hungry brunch passengers are awaiting their Saturday adventure.

A powerful steam engine leading a train through a forest is an awe-inspiring experience for diehard fans or curious civilians alike.



In the cab, 15 mph feels like 60. You hang on tightly to a metal grab iron or anything else that's solidly attached and within reach. The regular crew exhibits the acrobatics of their craft by hanging off the sides looking forward and back as they monitor the condition of the track ahead and the train cars behind.

The morning Pacific Northwest chill is more than offset by the heat radiating from the firebox, its fiercely burning fire visible through a circular hole in the firebox door.

I was impressed by the intense focus and professionalism of everyone from the veteran engineer to the fireman-in-training. They delivered a master class in running steam.

We rolled into the town of Elbe with whistle bellowing and steam billowing, surely a glorious sight for the waiting passengers. I stood on the bench looking over the tender and the rails ahead as the train slowed to a stop alongside the depot.

We would ride the next leg of the journey as passengers in one of the refurbished cars. Our time experiencing the steam life from a front-row seat was over.

THE GUEST EXPERIENCE

All the employees of the railroad provide a critical role in the onboard guest experience for ticketed passengers. The baggage car has been reimagined as a rolling gift and snack shop with the attendant playing double duty as the onboard narrator. He told us this particular car was originally operated by Canadian National.

Onboard merchandise and snack purchases contribute to the non-profit railroad's bottom line, which, I can only imagine, is a

Nathan Baine, a fireman and steam mechanic with Mt. Rainier, reads Polson Lumber 2-8-2 No. 70 for the day's work.



Bethan Maher, the railroad's executive director, studies the work in progress.

STEAM AND SUPERSTITION

WHEN TRAINS MAGAZINE AUTHOR LOU MAXON was invited to experience steam railroading from the cab, he entered a world few non-railroaders will see.

He watched as the crew went through their pre-departure routine for Polson Logging Co. No 70, the museum's century-old 2-8-2 Mikado. Then something unexpected happened. Bethan Maher, the railroad's executive director, swung up into the cab, set down a can of whole kernel corn, and asked Lou to have it photographed as proof it was onboard for the run.

The corn, Bethan later explained, is a railroad tradition, born years earlier when steam preservation legend Doyle McCormack joked of the need to "feed your hogs a little corn" to get them to cooperate. At some point, during a particularly frustrating day, someone offered Polson No. 70 a can of corn as a bribe.

Bethan added, "And wouldn't you know it, she ran like a dream afterward."

"Ever since, we've kept up the tradition. Every week starts with a fresh offering, and we always keep extra corn on board — just in case. Because, without fail, every major mechanical issue we've had in the last five years happened on days when we didn't have corn in the cab."

As Lou writes, "Steam doesn't want you in a hurry, can be temperamental, requires surgical expertise, a bit of luck, and a hint of superstition."

And never, never, forget to feed your hogs a little corn — *Carl Swanson*



Polson Logging Co. No. 70 is a 100-year-old 2-8-2 Mikado. Running it requires considerable expertise, an intense focus on safety, and just maybe a can of corn.





▲ Fireman Nathan Baine, at left, and Mechanic Aric Cole are immersed in the pre-departure routine of safety checks, tending to the boiler, and feeding the fire.

► Engineer Rowdy Pierce in the cab and Conductor Jackson Roulst riding the pilot, wave to train riders as their locomotive switches ends for the next leg of the journey.

significant number considering the need to support all the moving parts of running a successful tourist operation.

Ticketed passengers experience the historic 100-year-old steam engine and a train consisting of a luxury lounge car, the open-air *Mountain View* car, two historic Pullman passenger coaches, and the concession car. The railroad also offers themed excursions from brunch trains to whiskey trains, and the ever-popular *Polar Express* inspired by the book and film.

As we head farther up the track, the passengers get to experience a bit of real-time railroading as the train eases to a halt to allow the locomotive to detach, head up the track, turn, and roll past the cars and recouple at the rear of the train for the trek back to Mineral, Wash. Switching is a great opportunity for passengers to capture photos and videos from the open-air car. One couple on our train had an especially memorable trip by getting engaged in the lounge car while moving under steam power.

Safety is always at the forefront of rail operations and the run back to Mineral was no exception. On our return to the yard, the train stopped to allow crew members to clear away branches blocking the line. This forest in the shadow of Mt. Rainier provides a stunning setting for a tourist railroad but the heavily wooded area clearly presents its own challenges. With the track cleared, we were soon on our way.

RAILROAD SUFFERS FIRE

THE MT. RAINIER SCENIC RAILROAD experienced a serious loss on April 30th, 2025, when a catastrophic fire destroyed the railroad's largest wooden trestle. The loss of the bridge did not interfere with regular passenger operations but did place the railroad's long-planned expansion in jeopardy. The fire is under investigation. Visit the railroad's homepage, mtrainerrailroad.com, for more information.



The passengers stayed on board in Mineral, but we thanked the crew and exited the train while they performed another switching exercise to move the locomotive to the other end of the train for the return to the Elbe depot.

We waved back to the engineer, fireman, and conductor as the train pulled out of Mineral with steam and smoke shooting from both sides and from the stack above.

It was wonderful to have spent time surrounded by such a hard-working crew, who put in long hours honing their craft to provide the best possible experience for passengers.

The railroad provided us a rare inside look at running steam on a tourist railroad in the Pacific Northwest. My formerly mint condition bib overalls were initiated with evidence of time spent in a steam locomotive cab.

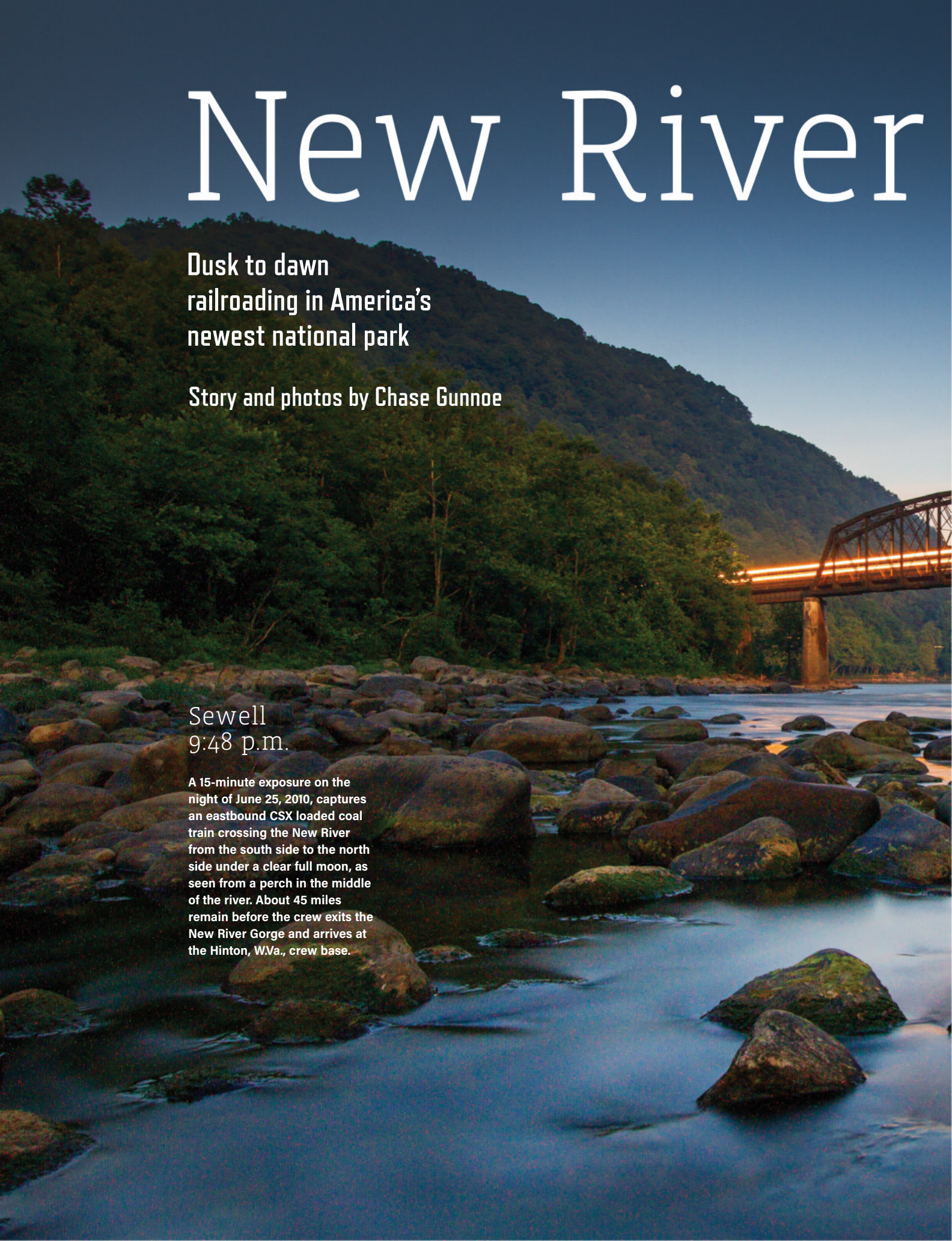
A big thank you to the entire crew at Mt. Rainier and special thanks to Bethan Maher for navigating the logistics and waivers to make my visit a possibility.

Once you get that first taste of what the crew experiences in the cab it becomes an addiction. I think Johnny Cash summarized it best, "I've got a thing about trains." **I**

► **Former Polson Logging No. 70 is ready for another day of delighting passengers in the shadow of Mt. Rainier.**



New River



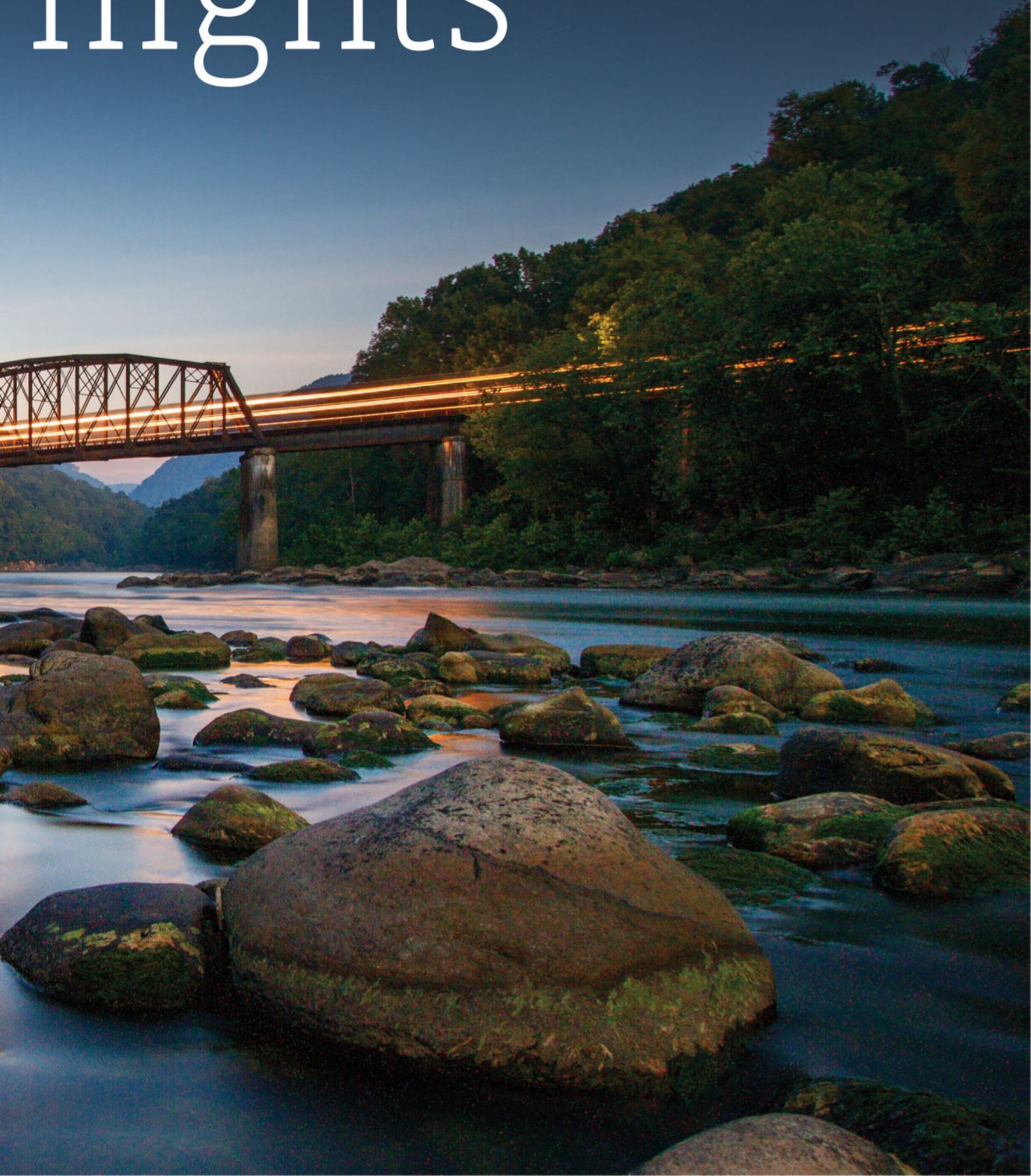
Dusk to dawn
railroading in America's
newest national park

Story and photos by Chase Gunnoe

Sewell
9:48 p.m.

A 15-minute exposure on the night of June 25, 2010, captures an eastbound CSX loaded coal train crossing the New River from the south side to the north side under a clear full moon, as seen from a perch in the middle of the river. About 45 miles remain before the crew exits the New River Gorge and arrives at the Hinton, WVa., crew base.

nights





Heavy Snow at Prince 3:15 a.m.

Eastbound CSX coal loads navigate heavy, wet snow as they pass the former Chesapeake & Ohio Railway depot in Prince, W.Va., in the early morning hours of Feb. 1, 2013. Snowflakes and heavy wind blanket the lens, but somehow in this 1/30th of a second exposure, a clear photo of the coal loads emerges. The rear of the train is still in Stretchers Neck Tunnel, out of view.

Hour five and the only thing I have to show for it is wet feet and mosquito bites. I'm perched on a flattop boulder in the river, 100 feet from the bank. Water brushes my boot heels and occasional splashes dampen my socks. My tripod legs are submerged in the murky water, nestled in the small pebbles of the riverbed. Loyd Lowry, a southern West Virginia photographer, is perched on another rock to my left. He's far more unfazed by our surroundings than I.

For 300 minutes, I've listened to the roar of the Class IV river rapids reverberating off the mountains, certain I

could hear the drone of General Electric 4,400-horsepower AC locomotives leading east-bound coal loads.

A nearly full moon provides enough ambient light to dimly outline shapes, but my imagination dwells on what I *can't* see. Using the one bar of cell service on my phone, I search for information on the snakes of West Virginia. I learn the state's common water snake, while nonvenomous, is the region's most defensive. Could a northern copperhead or a timber rattlesnake be enjoying the rocks still warm from the day's summer sun? I realize imagination is consuming my

thoughts, just as I've repeatedly convinced myself of hearing an approaching train.

I finally hear something other than the river's thunder as my scanner mutters unintelligibly. A distant glimmer of light confirms a train is coming. I use its headlights to dial in my camera's autofocus. This is risky — it can easily be misjudged. Fumbling with the camera's settings one more time, I ease open the shutter.

Two locomotives, moving from left to right, drift across the 700-foot truss bridge with 16,000 tons of export coal bound for a steel mill in India. Until yesterday, this coal had



of wheel flanges fade as the train disappears stage right.

I close the shutter release and allow the camera to process the 15-minute drama. After a few seconds, it displays the result of five hours of waiting in a single 35 megabyte image. The Canon 7D has preserved the moment and our work here is done.

From coal to tourism

This is railroading in America's newest National Park — the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve in southern West Virginia. A place where rock climbing, whitewater rafting, and hiking coexist with heavy tonnage mountain railroading. It's the main passage of CSX Transportation's original Chesapeake & Ohio Railway main between the Midwest and Newport News, Va.

Each crevice of this newly designated National Park has a relationship with railroading in an area that's turning from coal mining to tourism.

Flexing more than 70,000 acres and incorporating 53 miles of the continent's oldest river, the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve's most western point starts at Hawks Nest Lake, climbing east to Bluestone Dam at Hinton, W.Va. The railroad parallels the river through it all, in the trough of the gorge 900 feet below the tips of the tall eastern hemlocks lining the ridge. Between these points are places like Thurmond, one of the country's smallest incorporated towns, and Prince where the C&O's Streamline Moderne-style depot takes us to 1946. Little reminds us of the present day on this railroad.

There is something ageless about the New River after the sun has disappeared beyond the canyon's western rim. In the nighttime hours mountains meet river and rail and a twinkling headlight could be misinterpreted for a 1950s C&O flagship passenger train *George Washington*.

Thurmond in its quietest hour 4:09 a.m.

An eastbound CSX coal train led by a conventional-cab GE C40-8 eases into view, framed by Thurmond's iconic steam-era coaling tower, abandoned storefronts, and C&O cantilever signal. River rapids, out of view to the left, mute the sound of the approaching train but there's no mistaking the headlight on this predawn morning of June 10, 2013. With a population of five, Thurmond is one of the smallest incorporated municipalities in the U.S. Once a bustling railroad town, its buildings are now preserved and maintained by the National Park Service.

been undisturbed for millions of years, deep beneath West Virginia's surface.

The locomotives are in view for 30 seconds, running lights reflecting off the creamy water below, before disappearing into the summer foliage on the river's north side. Dark coal hoppers blend into the muted background as my camera's sensor gathers the moment into a single image.

One by one, CSX coal hoppers rumble across the New River, each carrying about 108 tons of West Virginia's finest coal. A few minutes pass and a shimmering red light bounces off the truss bridge. The sound



Westbound empties by Sandstone Falls 6:21 p.m.

Coal empties for the southern West Virginia coalfields get under way from Hinton, WVa., entering the New River Gorge at Sandstone Falls shortly after sunset on Jan. 3, 2012, an exceptionally cold start to the New Year.

Destination for adventure

The New River Gorge has evolved from an area whose people extracted coal and lumber for much of the first half of the 20th century into an epicenter for outdoor adventurers. Its 2020 designation as a National Park piqued interest in the area. It features notable attractions like the New River Gorge Bridge, once the world's longest steel arch bridge spanning 3,030 feet across and 876 feet above the river and railroad below. Each year, the annual Bridge Day event allows thrill seekers to base jump from the bridge, plunging into the brisk river — taking intermittent breaks to allow for coal trains to pass below.

And the river itself, known for its Class III and IV rapids, hosts more than 65,000 rafters

annually. A couple of ridges across, tens of thousands of Boy Scouts take part in national and international jamborees at the Bechtel Summit Reserve.

Federal park oversight and the gorge's steep terrain have inhibited development for much of the past 100 years. In fact, the railroad's original construction and the bygone days of coal mining and timber extraction means the gorge had far more inhabitants a century ago. Today, the earth has reclaimed much of this land, but original structures and landmarks remain for those who know where to look.

In assembling this series of photos, I've spent far more hours in these lands under the blanket of darkness than during daylight, seeking to connect the railroad and the raw mountain beauty. **I**





Coal empties underneath the New River Gorge Bridge 12:43 a.m.

A westbound CSX empty coal train passes through Fayette Station and underneath the New River Gorge bridge 876 feet above. The location is near Fayetteville, W. Va., and the time is shortly after midnight on June 23, 2013.



Hawks Nest coal loads 11:44 p.m.

A full moon peeks through low-hanging clouds and a developing layer of fog on the New River Gorge's rim a few minutes before midnight on June 16, 2011, as eastbound CSX coal loads hug the New River at Hawks Nest, near Ansted, W.Va.

Four minutes at Grandview - 9:26 p.m.

An eastbound CSX loaded coal train takes five minutes to enter the camera's view from the left and disappear to the right on its overnight trip through the New River Gorge on Oct. 22, 2012. The full moon is illuminating much of the fall foliage below an overlook appropriately named Grandview.





Chicago Union

Change has been constant
at city's passenger hub

by Bob Johnston

▼ An Oct. 1, 2019 image shows the results of the makeover that helped restore features of Union Station's Great Hall, including the skylight blacked out in World War II. Bob Johnston



Station marks 00

▼ An undated photo of “the new Union Station,” suggesting it was taken not long after the building’s 1925 opening, shows what was then called the Main Waiting Room. The Milwaukee Road





▲ Four railroads — two Pennsylvania subsidiaries, the Burlington, and a Milwaukee Road predecessor — provided the money for Union Station, which took 16 years from the start of planning to completion.

Trains collection

Were they able to talk, all the elements of Chicago Union Station would have a lot to say about how they have been shuffled, sliced, and diced over the last 100 years.

The platforms, tracks, signature skylight, light fixtures, hidden rooms, entrances, underground passages, and office spaces have seen constant revision and renovation. These

machinations continue: Some tracks and platforms are being realigned while Amtrak and Metra passengers moving between the north and south boarding areas dodge scaffolding as the City of Chicago rebuilds Canal Street overhead.

These are just the latest challenges this mainstay of Windy City transportation has faced. The station has certainly had an interesting journey.

Filling a need

Though Chicago Union Station's official grand opening was staged on July 23, 1925, some trains began using the unfinished building's platforms in mid-May of that year, following more than a decade of planning and construction. The station was bankrolled by two Pennsylvania Railroad subsidiaries; the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy; and Milwaukee



Road predecessor Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul. Those lines, plus the Chicago & Alton, had built north-south tracks along the west side of the Chicago River beginning in the 1850s. By 1881, a consolidated “Union Depot” opened east of Canal Street, where the north concourse platforms of today’s Union Station load Amtrak Milwaukee-bound and Metra passengers.



With departures multiplying, the Pennsylvania took the lead in commissioning a new station in 1909. It was designed by the firm started by Daniel H. Burnham, the architect known for his vision of Chicago’s lake-front park system and the oft-quoted admonition, “Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men’s blood.”

Construction began four years later, after Burnham’s death, but was interrupted by World War I’s material and manpower shortages.

The \$75 million facility (\$1.37 billion in 2025 dollars, assuming 3% annual inflation) was able to accommodate larger crowds than its cramped predecessor because a separate, eight-story Neoclassical headhouse structure rose on the west side of Canal Street. It featured a skylighted, barrel-vaulted waiting room surrounded by offices on higher floors, restaurants, a men’s barber shop, and a stately women’s lounge.

Windows selling tickets for all lines, railroad passenger agents’ desks, baggage-handling counters, and other station services were arrayed in

the broad passage under Canal Street, leading from the waiting room to a cathedral-like, arched-ceilinged concourse building. The structure provided ample space to accommodate travelers scurrying to and from platforms for 10 odd-numbered tracks on the north side and 14 even-numbered tracks facing south — essentially two one-way terminals under one roof. That put Chicago Union Station in an class by itself among U.S. train stations, a distinction it maintains.

The big squeeze

From its inception, this double stub-end arrangement on the narrow sliver of land next to the Chicago River allowed only a pair of run-through tracks on the east side of the station. These generally accommodated Milwaukee Road head-end cars moving to mail docks directly below a new Chicago Post Office building constructed south of the concourse.

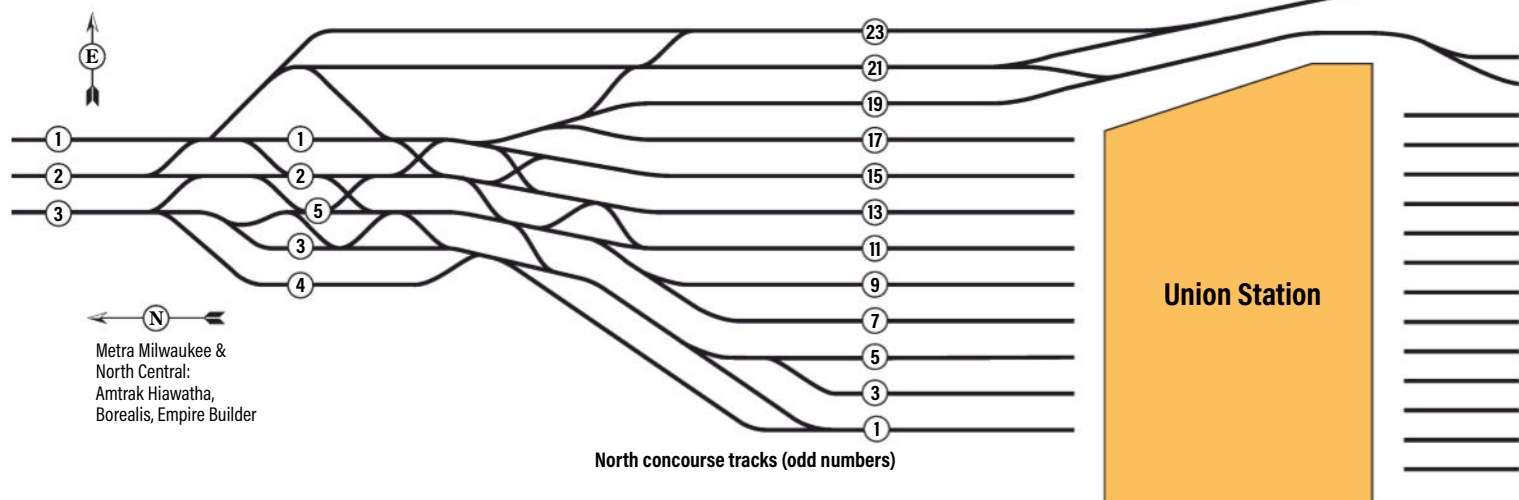
Another feature executed during construction: some tracks for long-distance trains were laid between two plat-

▲ An early station photo features the concourse building in the foreground, torn down in 1969 after air rights were sold to allow construction of a skyscraper. Just visible at lower left is one of the two through tracks of the otherwise double-stub-ended design, a constraint on current operations. The Milwaukee Road

forms — one for passengers and one for mail, express and baggage. These continue to be utilized for checked baggage that only a small percentage of Amtrak trains handle, yet are shunned by horn-honking Red Caps deftly weaving motorized carts down platforms crowded with passengers.

The drawback of the baggage platforms is that in the 1920s, their ramps were designed to lead directly to the bowels of the station. So today, having motorized vehicles carry travelers and their luggage to reach the isolated platforms requires navigating a circuitous underground maze and an elevator ride. Plans have been advanced to widen platforms used primarily by Metra customers by repositioning tracks

The tracks of Chicago Union Station



and eliminating isolated baggage platforms, reposition tracks, and build wider platforms for Metra commuters, but a solution utilizing the little-used parallel trainside space to better separate Amtrak passengers and vehicles remains elusive.

When the layout was conceived, it was assumed that trains of Pennsylvania Railroad's Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago & St. Louis subsidiary — known as the "Panhandle" for its route through West Virginia — would use the station's north platforms, because the line's roundabout entry from Indiana joined Milwaukee trackage several miles west of downtown at Western Avenue's Tower A-2

By the time the station opened, however, the Pennsy had routed Panhandle trains from central Indiana via Chicago's south side to enter with Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago Railway trains from the east. A vestige of the originally anticipated arrangement,

PRR position-light signaling, governed Union Station's north approach until 2018.

Shifting growth

A November 1925 *Official Guide of the Railways* shows the station handling about 128 daily intercity trains: 42 on the Pennsy, 38 on the Milwaukee Road, 26 on the CB&Q, and 22 on the Alton. An additional 42 Monday-through-Friday scheduled moves on the Milwaukee's two suburban lines and an unspecified number of Burlington locals to Aurora, Ill., joined the mix.

Those frequencies generally held steady into the 1950s, when the ratio began to shift toward suburban trips. By comparison, Amtrak today

averages about 59 arrivals and departures (the *Cardinal* operates triweekly). Metra's six Union Station-hosted routes connect 247 scheduled weekday trains, 100 on Saturday, and 90 on Sunday, not counting empty "flip-back" runs that don't carry passengers.

It's easy to take for granted today that all Chicago trains connect at one station, but that wasn't always the case. Until 1969 when Grand Central closed, Union Station was only one of six downtown stations hosting intercity trains. The others were Dearborn, North Western, LaSalle Street, and Central (which Amtrak exited in 1972). Connecting passengers used Parmalee Transfer Co. vehicles. They, along with

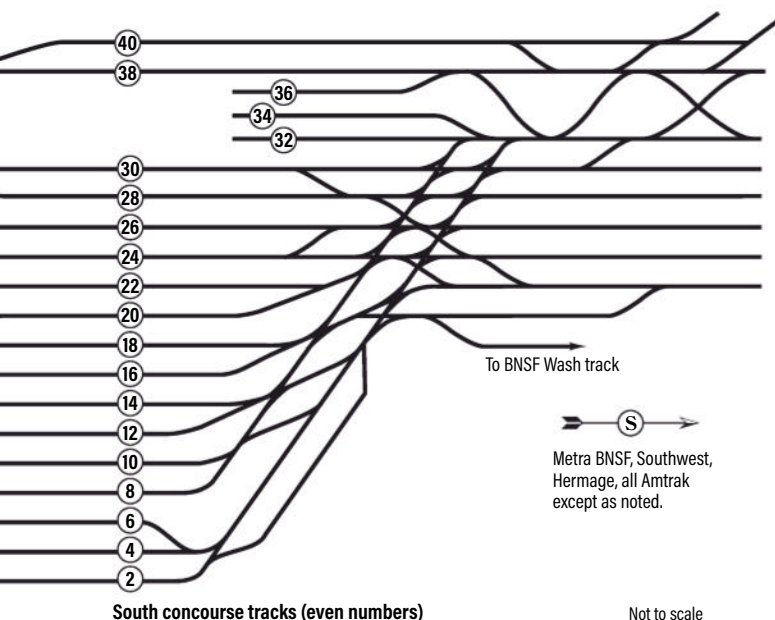
taxicabs and private vehicles, were able to use the station's underground automobile entry and exit on Clinton Street. Alas, this convenient feature was closed as a security precaution following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

What has become Chicago's largest interior public space, the Great Hall waiting room, experienced a significant makeover during a \$22 million headhouse overhaul completed in 2019, after remaining relatively austere through its first nine decades. Under Amtrak station ownership since 1984, the big room's skylight — blacked out during World War II and only maintained sporadically since to plug rain leaks — was completely rebuilt. Air conditioning and

► An Aug. 23, 1968, view from one of Union Station's platforms finds three Burlington E units that have led two sections of the *Empire Builder/North Coast Limited* (note the green classification lights on the unit at left) as well as the *California Zephyr*.

Three photos, Bob Johnston





lighting were beefed up to strengthen the Great Hall's status as the Windy City's "go to" event venue.

Forced underground

Rentals there and in the surrounding, recently upgraded rooms generate substantial revenue for Amtrak, but at times compromise the Great Hall's ability to accommodate passengers preparing to board trains. The space it provides has been especially indispensable since 1969. That was the year Union Station's previous owners, led by bankrupt PRR successor Penn Central, allowed the historic concourse building to be demolished after selling the air rights to real estate developers

► **The loss of the concourse building created a shortage of space for passengers to wait to board trains. As in this holiday view on Nov. 21, 2018, passengers are today lined up in the Great Hall and then led to their train at boarding time to avoid concourse congestion.**

for what is now the Fifth/Third Center building. The justification was that the concourse's space was expendable: intercity passenger trains would soon be gone, leaving only commuter trains. This was two years before federal funding became available for intercity rail through Amtrak.

All tracks and platforms remained intact, but getting to and from them became a claus-



trophobic obstacle course. Prior to the demolition, departing passengers could move freely across the concourse building's wide expanse and hang back from the massive black iron gates to make room for those who were arriving.

Improving the flow

To its credit, Amtrak has been on a never-ending mission to counteract the havoc caused

by that 1969 demolition. A comprehensive 1991 concourse renovation sought to alleviate boarding gate congestion by creating a separate exit corridor. In theory, this would allow detraining travelers to pass in front of those waiting to board. Even after the exit path was widened more than a decade later, however, the crush of detraining Amtrak passengers from even-numbered south tracks must still contend with scurrying morning and afternoon rush hour commuters racing to or from Metra BNSF or SouthWest Service trains.

For those departing on Amtrak, the Great Hall now acts as a gathering point before

◀ **Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker speaks during an event on July 22, 2025, to mark the 100th anniversary of dedication ceremonies for Union Station, held on July 23, 1925. Pritzker called the event "a celebration of what this place has meant to our nation and to the people of Illinois."** Bob Johnston



Renovation

CHICAGO UNION STATION'S

amenities included Fred Harvey's "Gold Lion" restaurant and nearby lunch counter diner, a barber shop, and other space adjacent to the building's enduring and endearing Main Waiting Room, which today is known as the Great Hall. A \$22 million head-house overhaul begun in 2016 helped restore original murals, light fixtures, and floor-to-ceiling columns in the station's original women's lounge (right, on Oct. 16, 2015) — neglected for decades, serving as a storage area — into the upscale Burlington Room, shown below on Nov. 30, 2016. — *Bob Johnston*



passengers are led to the hallway labyrinth, where they again must snake in separate lines waiting for trains to begin boarding. To rectify these traffic-flow drawbacks, Amtrak and the Illinois Department of Transportation are seeking a \$32 million Federal-State Partnership program matching

grant. It would accompany \$8 million provided by Amtrak, IDOT, Metra, Cook County, and Chicago's transportation department for a \$40 million station modernization project that has been on the drawing board in some form for more than a decade. Final design is expected this year, but in July,

Congressional appropriators sharply curtailed funding available for Federal-State projects. The amount of money available remains uncertain.

Other long-dormant space has been transformed into functional traffic and waiting areas passengers use every day, such as a new Clinton Street

entrance sporting benches. Fred Harvey's restaurants were once located here. Additional seats have also been tucked into a series of rooms between the Great Hall and concourses where local art is displayed. Amtrak spokesman Marc Magliari tells *Trains* the company continues to seek commer-



▲ Harrison Street Tower, visible at right, is the first of two controlling station traffic that were eliminated as the area around the station was developed. Closed in 1999, its functions were transferred to the north end's Lake Street Tower, which was itself closed in 2005. *Trains* collection



At the gates

ALSO SHOWING THE STATION'S EVOLUTION are the signs at the boarding gates (from 1971, 1995, and today), upgraded as technol-



ogy advanced. Train indicators were transformed over the years from boards placed next to the old concourse's towering iron and glass gates; the current version displays all Metra and Amtrak trains if a train is not boarding at that track. — *Bob Johnston*

LINE	TRAIN	DESTINATION	TRACK	TIME	STATUS
Hiaw	335	Milwaukee	17	1:05p	Gate Clos
Thruway	8973	Madison-UW	Bus	1:10p	On Time
NCS	105	Antioch	9	1:25p	On Time
MDW	2219	Big Timber	7	1:30p	On Time
MDN	2119	Grayslake	15	1:32p	On Time
BNSF	1231	Aurora	8	1:33p	On Time
BNS	811	Orla	10	1:42p	On Time
Texas E	21	San Antonio		1:52p	On Time
yr	5	Emeryville		2:00p	On Time
Thruway	8977	Madison-UW	Bus	2:10p	On Time
Wolverin	352	Pontiac, MI		2:15p	On Time
MDN	2121	Fox Lake	16	2:23p	On Time
S	3	Los Angeles		2:25p	On Time
BNSF	1301	Aurora	12	2:30p	On Time
MDW	2221	Big Timber	5	2:30p	On Time
BNSF	1233	Aurora	6	2:33p	On Time
Thruway	8967	Madison-UW	Bus	3:00p	On Time
BNSF	1235	Aurora	12	3:00p	On Time
Empire	27	Portland		3:05p	On Time
er	7	Seattle		3:05p	On Time
BNSF	1239	Aurora	6	3:10p	On Time
Hiaw	337	Milwaukee		3:15p	On Time

Gate 22 photo, *Trains* collection; four photos, Bob Johnston



▲ Work once performed at two towers is now performed in the Union Station dispatching center, shown May 22, 2017. Station tracks are displayed on the two monitors on the left; screens on the center desk cover Chicago yard movements and the approach to the station in New Orleans. On top is Amtrak's Michigan line between Porter, Ind., and Dearborn, Mich. Two photos, Bob Johnston

► A March 2025 view from the south end's unused high-level mail platform shows track 30 in the foreground, an island platform used to serve trains on that track, an empty track 28, and refurbished Superliners that have just arrived on the *Cardinal*.



cial occupancy around the central Clinton Street entrance, though virtually all food concessions remain concentrated in the mezzanine level above the concourse.

Changes in the way passengers buy transportation have dramatically reduced the need for ticket windows. The few

manned positions remaining have been moved from the narrow corridor under the stairs and escalators to Canal Street back to the hallway where they were located when Amtrak took over in 1971. Even the automated Quik Trak machines have been downsized and modernized; the new ver-

sions are seldom used because most travelers have the Amtrak app on their smartphones.

Shuffled dispatching

The Canal Street office building that forced Amtrak trains into the basement was neither the first nor last air-

rights sale affecting Union Station operations. Chicago's Daily News Building, now 2 Riverside Plaza, was built over the north tracks in 1929. More recent overhead construction prompted the demise of the two control towers that handled train movements, precipitating the consolidation of

dispatching at one location inside the station building.

First to go was Harrison Street Tower. A new U.S. Post Office distribution center adjacent to the 1920s facility was built around the original tower beginning in 1995. Operators in their enclosed cocoon still continued to manage south-end train movements beyond the Chicago River Bridge to the 21st Street Interlocking, where trains to St. Louis and Indiana diverge. In 1999, when that tower was shuttered, those duties moved to a new console at Lake Street Tower on the station's north end. But control operations ended at Lake in 2005 following completion of a \$45 million modernization project that replaced switch machines and dwarf signals dating from the 1920s.

All Chicago road dispatching functions are now consolidated at a secure dispatching center in Union Station's basement. It handles not only all Union Station and yard moves, but *Wolverines* east of Porter, Ind., as far as Dearborn, Mich., plus all activity at Clara Street Tower, guarding the throat of New Orleans' Union Passenger Terminal.

Future focus

Chicago Union Station's greatest asset is the convenience of connectivity it offers. However, its double-stub configuration, with only two run-through tracks, has limited greater equipment utilization and interchange between routes.

Fluidity could soon improve with the proposed transformation of unused mail platforms linked to both north and south departure tracks. Run-through operation was attempted at Amtrak's inception, when the company extended two St. Louis-Chicago round trips to Milwaukee, utilizing the track 19/28 common platform. That may not be a viable strategy today because of differences in route frequency, but creating additional capacity could facilitate more departures, or at least eliminate the serpentine passenger lines by getting trains

positioned to load earlier. This is how expanded capacity at the tracks can ease the perpetual crunch inside the station.

Should funding become available to do the work, Amtrak proposes to modify and remediate what are now deteriorating high-level mail platforms to serve three tracks that would be converted to run-through capability. Logistically, the situation is challenging because a dedicated, protected path would have to be created for travelers to safely cross

track 28 on the east side of the station. When contemplated more than a decade ago, the plan sought to utilize escalators down to moving walkways through long-dormant steam tunnels running underneath active south end tracks 28 and 30 to access the mail platform area. That idea has been jettisoned for a less-expensive "interim solution" to finally get the project moving.

Meanwhile, passengers have had to put up with intrusive underground catacombs of

scaffolding for the past year until Canal Street reconstruction is completed. Traffic patterns are being reconfigured to better serve passengers connecting to local transportation and Thruway buses. The above-ground transformation may not involve tracks and trains, but by attempting to rectify an obvious shortcoming dating to 2001 when the taxi tunnels were closed, it is emblematic of how Union Station continues to adapt and embrace the future after 100 years. **I**

First class

A GOOD EXAMPLE of how Amtrak continues to repurpose space in Union Station is what the company has done to cater to sleeping car patrons, seniors, and travelers with disabilities. A cozy Metropolitan Lounge for first-class passengers, updated in 1991 with a faux fireplace (top) and a colorful assortment of oddball furniture, closed in June 2016. That's when a much larger version opened in what was once the back room of Union Station's ticket office. The new multi-floor, multi-room Metropolitan Lounge, opened on June 23, 2016, (middle) now serves passengers three hours before departing in a sleeping car or transferring to one after arriving on another Amtrak train earlier in the day. The tastefully decorated space (bottom) offers snacks and beverages — as well as a quality venue to relax and store luggage. It became so busy that business-class patrons on regional trains can now only be accommodated if they pay for a day pass. The original space has not been abandoned. The former first-class lounge, located off the corridor between the north and south gates, provides a convenient waiting area for passengers requiring extra boarding assistance. — *Bob Johnston*



Three photos, Bob Johnston



Rebuilt EMDs displaced rare units on remote California short line in 1990s

Story and photos by David Lustig

At your next family gathering, ask people if they know what “trona” is. If someone does, he’s probably another railfan.

Trona, with a capital T, is the home of California’s Trona Railway, a 30.5-mile short line in the middle of nowhere. If you live at or near this desert oasis,

don’t get upset that I said that. I have a friend who lives about 25 miles away in Ridgecrest — it at least has a Walmart — and when I asked where she lived, the reply was, “The middle of nowhere.” Good enough.

For those of us who have ventured to Trona when the railroad is running and the weather

TRONA'S BALDWIN KILLERS



is cooperating, the trek through the arid landscape can provide great rewards.

Originally, motive power for the railroad — built in 1914 to haul potash — was a handful of medium-sized steam locomotives. These were sidelined by Baldwin road-switchers and a pair of center-cab, 2,000-hp

behemoths in the late 1940s and early '50s.

After years of service, the Baldwins were bumped in the 1990s by six EMD six-axle rebuilds. Even those were eventually replaced by another group of EMDs, this time castoffs from Southern Pacific and Union Pacific.

THE BALDWIN KILLERS

Make no mistake, Trona's Baldwin road units served the railroad well. Baldwin diesel salesmen regularly visited almost every railroad, large and small, as a potential customer. They usually took great pains to demonstrate the advantage of their rugged designs. Arriving

Old meets new as a Trona Railway Baldwin AS616 is lined up next to the railroad's newly acquired SD40-2 rebuilds in 1992.



One of Trona's massive Baldwin DT-6-200 center-cab locomotives and an AS616 are in charge of a train at Searles, Calif., on May 22, 1963. *Trains* collection



Shortly after their arrival in the California desert, all six of the EMD rebuilds show off their flashy red-and-silver paint scheme while lined up at the yard in Trona in February 1993.

in 1949, a pair of DT-6-2000 center-cab diesels propelled the railroad into the internal combustion age with style. Used together, they churned out 4,000 hp, more than enough for the trains of the day. Backed up by Baldwin's maintenance people and a reliable spare parts supply, the locomotives were more than a match for the extreme heat and strong winds they would encounter more

times than not.

A few years later, the railroad returned to the builder for a 1,600-hp AS616 road-switcher, followed by two similar secondhand units, one from Southern Pacific, the other from Pacific Northwest logger Rayonier.

With more than enough horsepower and available units, Trona's shop crews could take their time servicing and, when

necessary, rebuilding their small fleet of locomotives.

TIME CONQUERS ALL

But heavy use hauling trains in harsh desert conditions will eventually grind down any locomotive, and no matter what the maintenance schedule, the decision to replace the Baldwins was inevitable. The builder merged with Lima-Hamilton in 1951; Baldwin-Lima-Hamilton exited the locomotive business five years later. The desire for more modern equipment, hopefully easier to maintain, was presumably a driving factor for Trona.

Trona is not a place where fans regularly drive past going to and from work. So how did the word get out before the internet that the Baldwins' days were numbered?

Old-fashioned word of mouth, supplemented by wonderfully informative phone calls to the Flimsies Hotline, where callers could listen to Bill Farmer dispensing the latest fan news. One day in early 1993, six rebuilt six-axle EMD road locomotives arrived decked out in a flashy red-and-silver paint scheme, the words "Trona Railway" splashed on their flanks. Hot stuff!

ROAD TRIP

As anyone who has trekked to Trona knows, the drive from any direction is not for the faint of heart. Extreme weather is always a possibility in that part of California. Trona (population about 1,700 as of

the 2020 census) is about 40 miles southwest of Badwater Basin, the Death Valley spot that is the lowest point in the continental U.S. at 282 feet below sea level. For those in Trona, climate (average temperatures 103 degrees in July and August) and poor soil make lawns a foreign concept. (The local high school is famous, or infamous, for playing on a football field of packed and rolled sand. The baseball field is similarly barren.) If luck is on your side, you might even get a mild day with just a hint of a breeze!

Whatever the weather, to Baldwin lovers everywhere, this was a time of mourning — the end of an era where enduring the difficulty of reaching Trona would yield the reward of watching rare motive power on a unique short line.

For me, pointing my Ford into the desert to see their replacements was a matter of



A builder's plate from Montreal remanufacturer AMF shows the rebuilt locomotive, completed in 1992, is officially designated as an SD40-2.



An SD40-2 is coupled to a pair of AS616s during the period when the Baldwins remained in yard service before being shipped to an Oklahoma operator.

principle; I wanted to see the Baldwins one last time in their native habitat, as well as take a look at the new power.

Both did not disappoint.

Idling next to the Baldwins were a half-dozen six-axle EMD road-switchers sparkling in the desert sun with not a hint of desert grit clinging to them. An employee explained the units were rebuilt from retired SD45-2s from a variety of railroads by AMF of Montreal, and were now mechanically identical SD40-2Rs. All were leased. The Baldwins were officially demoted to yard service before being sold to points east.

From speaking with other fans, there seemed to be a genuine downturn in visitors during the next few years, a phenomenon first noted in the 1950s when steam began disappearing in North America. A number of photographers who avidly chronicled their favorite railroads tapered off for a while; steam was gone, and diesels were just not as interesting.



Former Southern Pacific AS616 No. 53 shows the toll of decades of work in the harsh climate of the Mojave Desert, while newly arrived SD40-2R No. 3001 — a former Santa Fe unit — still shines.

Perhaps that is what happened to the Trona.

Ultimately, after many years plodding back and forth between Trona and the outside interchange at Searles, the sextet was returned to its owners after the lease expired. Their replacements were a number of similar-looking EMDs, sans the flashy paint scheme.

TRONA TODAY

In 2025, the Trona Railway continues unabated, the latest units powering substantial trains of covered hoppers. The company spirit is still there, even if the Baldwins and their red-and-silver EMD successors are history.

Is the Trona Railway still worth visiting today? Absolute-

ly. It is still a regular display of raw power combined with diesel technology going against everything nature can throw at it. That Trona does it successfully day after day is a testament to its train crews and mechanics in a harsh environment.

Bring some water, a hat, and sunscreen and watch the show for yourself. **I**

RESURRECTED PA MAKES FIRST RUN





Short line company Genesee Valley Transportation celebrates completion of lengthy restoration effort

By David Lassen

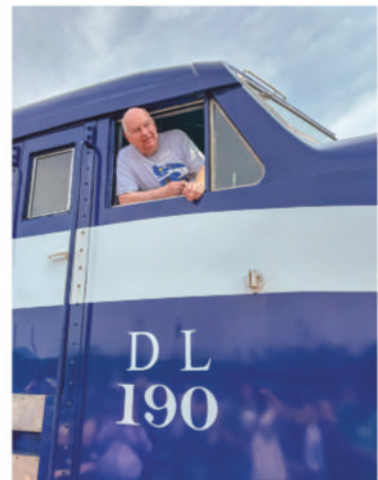
Photos by Scott A. Hartley

After an effort spanning more than a quarter-century, an Alco PA locomotive is once again in service. Genesee Valley Transportation's PA4 No. 190 — acquired in 2023 from preservationist Doyle McCormack and wearing the Nickel Plate Road "Bluebird" paint scheme favored by McCormack — debuted July 11-12 with invitation-only excursions on GVT's Delaware-Lackawanna Railroad between Scranton and Mount Pocono, Pa.

It is believed to be the first time a PA hauled passengers in the U.S. since October 1978, when No. 190 and three brethren, built for Santa Fe and later owned by Delaware & Hudson, concluded a year as leased commuter-train power for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. The last time PAs were in passenger service on the route of July's trips was 1965, when former Erie units handled Erie Lackawanna trains on the former Delaware, Lackawanna & Western main line, according to GVT chairman David Monte Verde.

McCormack was on hand and spent time at the throttle during the first run. In ceremonies beforehand, he was honored by GVT for his role in preserving the unit and presented with a replica Alco-GE builder's plate.

The locomotive's path to restoration began with years-long work by the Smithsonian Institution's Bill Withuhn and McCormack to repatriate ex-D&H units Nos. 18 and 16 from Mexico, where they were wrecked in the early 1980s. All



Doyle McCormack, the locomotive's former owner, takes the throttle of PA No. 190 during its inaugural run on the Delaware-Lackawanna Railroad on July 11, 2025.

On its second excursion run on July 12, 2025, No. 190, backed by C420 No. 405, passes the restored station at Gouldsboro, Pa., now a local museum.



Genesee Valley Transportation President Michael Thomas (far right) speaks in Scranton during ceremonies prior to No. 190's invitation-only debut trip on July 11, 2025. To his right are GVT Chairman David Monte Verde; Doyle and Laurie McCormack; and John Herbrand, secretary and general counsel.

four of the D&H PAs were sold to Mexico; the other two reportedly remain intact at the National Museum of Mexican Railways in Puebla.

In March 1999, a cultural exchange agreement between the Smithsonian and the government of Mexico cleared the way for return of the two wrecked diesels. That October, they were shipped north from the former Chihuahua Pacific Railroad

shops in Sonora, Mexico. The units, little more than shells, arrived in April 2000 in Albany, Ore., where McCormack began work on the former No. 18.

"People don't understand my passion for this PA project because they don't understand the history of it," McCormack told *Trains* in 2000. "When I was a boy, my dad worked for the Nickel Plate, and the first diesel I ever rode on was PA

190. The Nickel Plate became my passion, and that's why a fully functional Nickel Plate PA is going to rise again."

By 2008, the carbody was largely restored, and in 2014 the unit appeared at the North Carolina Transportation Museum's "Streamliners at Spencer" event. McCormack continued work until GVT acquired the locomotive for use on office-car and excursion trains in 2023 [see "Preservation," "Famed Alco PA will move ...," June 2023].

Company President Michael D. Thomas said then that it was "a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to obtain the 'Spirit of St. Louis' of locomotives ... We are ecstatic that Doyle has entrusted us with the stewardship of his great gift to rail preservation." The locomotive was moved to Scranton in May 2023, and was displayed at the Steamtown National Historic Site for a short period before moving into the GVT shops to resume the restoration. GVT

Chief Mechanical Officer Bill Strein and his staff were also recognized for their work to complete the project during the first-run ceremonies.

The first day's train — a power car, an ex-NJ Transit Comet coach, sleeping car *City of Lima* and business car No. 2 — also featured RS3 No. 4068 in its recently applied D&H paint scheme. A C420 served as the second unit on Saturday.

No. 190's Nickel Plate paint scheme looks flawless as the excursion train passes through Elmhurst, Pa., on July 12, 2025. The boxcar is a power car.





C420 No. 405 leads a freight passing the excursion train in Scranton on July 11, 2025. The next day, No. 405 replaced D&H-painted RS3 No. 4068 on the PA-led train.

From Santa Fe to D&H

No. 190 was completed by Alco in December 1948, going to Santa Fe as its No. 62L. It was one of four Santa Fe PAs acquired by the Delaware & Hudson in 1967; all four received a



The PA's characteristic long nose is emphasized in this view of No. 190 on July 10, 2025, the night before its debut.

variant of the Santa Fe "Warbonnet" paint scheme using D&H colors. Purchase of the locomotives and some second-hand passenger cars allowed the railroad to upgrade its two New York-Albany-Montreal passenger trains, the daytime *Laurentian* and the overnight *Montreal Limited*. (Those trains operated on New York Central/Penn Central between Albany and New York's Grand Central Terminal, using NYC/PC power). The D&H trains were not included in the original Amtrak



A crowd gathers at the station in Scranton for ceremonies prior to the PA's inaugural round trip to Mount Pocono, Pa., on July 11, 2025. The locomotive will also see action on the railroad's office-car trains.



network and were discontinued in 1971, with the locomotives traded in to General Electric.

But D&H President C. Bruce Sterzing reacquired the locomotives, which operated on occasional excursions until 1974. That year, New York state and Amtrak agreed to restore a daily New York-Albany-Montreal train, the *Adirondack*, with the state paying to refurbish D&H-supplied equipment. The PAs went to Morrison-Knudsen in Boise, Idaho, for a rebuild, where their original Alco 244 prime movers were replaced with 251 engines for an upgrade to 2,400 hp. The rebuilds were designated as PA4s.

The D&H equipment was replaced by Amtrak's Rohr

Turboliners after three years. The PAs saw intermittent use in freight service, then were stored in May 1977 following Sterzing's departure from the Delaware & Hudson.

They reemerged for their one-year stay on the MBTA, then were sold to an equipment dealer who found a home for them in Mexico.

The other repatriated PA4, originally Santa Fe No. 59L, was donated by the Smithsonian Institution to the Museum of the American Railroad in Frisco, Texas, in 2010. It is being restored there.

A Facebook page, "Restoration of the Santa Fe Chief – Alco PA #59," tracks the ongoing project. **I**



Autumn then and now

Fall foliage season is one of the best times to plan a railroad adventure

▲ On Oct. 21, 1993, rusty trees and an overgrown cemetery make for an autumnal setting on CSX's former Baltimore & Ohio at Grave Yard Curve near Terra Alta, W.Va. CSX westward freight R317 is descending the famed Cranberry Grade. Brian Solomon

AUTUMN IS A WONDERFUL TIME

to experience railroading. Decades ago, I'd embark on week-long trips in the Fall to explore my favorite railroads. I'd arrange my itinerary to make the most of the autumn foliage, carefully planning my travels based on where and when colors would at their best.

I'd start with trips to Vermont at the end of September and early October, where I'd photograph the Central Vermont Railway (later New England Central) and Green Mountain Railroad — aiming to catch its vintage Rutland RS1 working fall excursions.

As the season progressed, I'd work my way down through the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts, photographing Conrail on the old Boston & Albany — where blue diesels contrasted nicely against rusty leaves. Late October was reserved for the former Baltimore & Ohio, where I spent time on

CSX's Mountain Subdivision observing trains ascending the legendary Cranberry Grade, where a hidden-in-the-forest graveyard seemed made to order for the season.

In the West, I photographed trains crossing Colorado's Tennessee Pass on Southern Pacific's Rio Grande lines, where brilliant aspens caught the sun at an elevation of 10,000 feet. In 1995-96, SP was working its most modern power on unit coal and iron ore trains: new GE AC4400CWs, leading and with mid-train and rear-end DPUs.

Following Union Pacific trains through California's Feather River Canyon was always a pleasure in the autumn. Here, rock walls towered above trains slowly snaking along the canyon floor, where occasional brown or yellow trees mimicked the Armour Yellow of UP's locomotives that provided an accent against evergreens

that dotted the canyon walls.

That was then, this is now ...

PLAN A FALL GETAWAY

Autumn 2025 has plenty to offer, everything from photographing freight trains on your favorite mountain grade against a backdrop of brilliantly colored leaves, going for a cross-country journey on Amtrak, or taking advantage of autumnal excursions operated by various heritage railroads.

Consider Vermont Rail System's *Champlain Valley Dinner Train*, which boards at the Burlington, Vt., Amtrak station in the evenings on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from Sept. 14 through Nov. 1.

For Midwesterners, Wisconsin's East Troy Electric is running its weekend Harvest Fest between the Elegant Farmer Station and East Troy. (east-troyrr.org/harvest-fest.html).

In eastern Pennsylvania, Reading & Northern plans a



The Cranberry Grade on CSX's Mountain Subdivision is one of the steepest double track lines in the East and well-known for its brilliant autumn foliage. Eastward freight R316 climbs toward Terra Alta, W.Va. on Oct. 21, 1993.

Brian Solomon

variety of autumn excursions centered on traveling to the historic town of Jim Thorpe for a several-hour layover. On September weekends, trains from Reading Outer Station depart at 9 a.m. On October weekends, trips from Pottsville to Jim Thorpe depart at 8:30 a.m. September and October weekend trips from Pittston Junction depart at 8:45 a.m. These are all-day journeys, returning to their point of origin in the evenings. R&N offers a great variety of rolling stock. On Sept. 13, the railroad is running a special for the Mountain Top Rotary Club led by 4-8-4 No. 2102. It will operate between the Penobscot station and Jim Thorpe and will pass through the Lehigh Gorge. Tickets for this trip

require advance purchase. Check R&N's website for these and other autumn special trips (rbmnrr-passenger.com).

If you are looking for a shorter ride in the Jim Thorpe area, consider a spin on the Lehigh Gorge Scenic Railway's 45-minute *Autumn Leap* trip. These trains depart on the hour from the former Central Railroad of New Jersey station near the center of town. (lgsry.com/autumn-leaf-season).

Here's something to consider (I'm thinking about it!): in July, the Virginia Scenic Railroad announced it has planned a season of *Shenandoah Valley Limited* trips running behind Virginia Museum of Transportation's former Norfolk & Western J-class 4-8-4 No. 611. This beautifully restored streamlined steam locomotive, dressed in glossy black with accents of Tuscan and gold paint, is well suited for autumn trips on the Buckingham Branch Railroad. The 611 steam trips are advertised to depart from Victoria Station in Goshen, Va.

Speaking of Victoria Stations, if you are up for an elegant railroad trip (and money isn't a problem) nip over across the pond to the United Kingdom this autumn and take a ride on one of Belmond's luxury heritage excursions using the British Pullman train departing from London's Victoria Station. Belmond's "Moving Murder Mystery" is scheduled for 10:55 departure from Victoria on Oct. 1. Prices start at \$723 per person; however, couples may

book a private compartment (two adults) for \$1,496. If that's a little steep, consider the slightly more economical Great Pullman Sunday Lunch that departs Victoria at 11 a.m. on Oct. 5. The fare is just \$615.

If you just want to take a pleasant train ride and don't want to pay for extravagance, you can purchase a return trip aboard the *Gatwick Express* to and from Victoria to Gatwick Airport for just \$44. — *Brian Solomon*



In October 2024, Reading & Northern's newly christened *Anthracite Voyager* rolls along at Molino, Pa., on an excursion returning from Jim Thorpe destined for Reading Outer Station. This autumn Reading & Northern is offering numerous excursions on its lines in eastern Pennsylvania. Brian Solomon

Rowland, steam preservation titan, dies

Golden Spike Limited, American Freedom Train just part of substantial legacy

▲ Ross Rowland, right, shares the cab window of Nickel Plate Road No. 759 with *Trains* Editor David P. Morgan in 1970. Don Wood

AS HE APPROACHED HIS FINAL DAYS, Ross E. Rowland could look back secure in the knowledge that U.S. steam — indeed even the entire rail preservation scene — owes him a substantial debt. From his Golden Spike exhibition train of 1969 to the American Freedom Train of 1975-76 to his ACE 3000 project of 1985, Rowland compiled a singular record of high-profile steam operations.

Rowland, 85, died July 19 after a brief battle with cancer.

A Wall Street commodities trader by profession but a steam entrepreneur at heart, Rowland was associated with operation of an unprecedented variety of large steam locomotives, including Nickel Plate 2-8-4 No. 759, three Canadian Pacific 4-6-2s, Reading 4-8-4s Nos. 2101 and 2102, and Chesapeake & Ohio 4-8-4 No. 614. All as a private operator, not a railroad official.

He's likely best remembered as a showman, conceiving and staging steam operations on a national stage, most notably the *Golden Spike Centennial Limited* behind NKP 759 and his part in the American Freedom Train.

Dan Cupper, editor of *Railroad History*, the journal of the Railway & Locomotive Histori-

cal Society, credits Rowland with taking advantage of a unique moment in rail history.

"When steam locomotives had become irrelevant, passenger trains were on life support, and American railroads were free-falling into bankruptcy at a rate not seen since the Great Depression, Rowland came along to brashly champion all three," says Cupper. "Coming from a person not employed by the railroad industry, this was unprecedented."

As a teenager, Rowland became involved in New York City's futures investment industry. By 1966 he had his own firm, Floor Brokers Associates, Inc. He also served on the board of directors of precious-metals investment firm COMEX.

The financial career seemed mostly to serve as a platform for his involvement in railroading. He formed the High Iron Co. in 1966, operating steam excursions in the Northeast and landing a signature locomotive in 1967 with NKP No. 759, leased from the Steamtown museum in Bellows Falls, Vt. Rowland made headlines with the engine, including its use in May 1969 to haul the Golden Spike special from Har-

mon, N.Y., to Kansas City, where the train was turned over to Union Pacific for a ceremony at Promontory, Utah.

That operation served as a template for the American Freedom Train, a trainload of exhibits and artifacts from American history. For the AFT, Rowland acquired retired Reading 4-8-4 No. 2101, restored it quickly, and used it for the train's appearances east of Chicago.

Rowland then worked out an arrangement with Chessie System for the 4-8-4 to haul excursions beginning in 1977 as the Chessie Steam Special. When No. 2101 was severely damaged in a 1979 roundhouse fire, Chessie compensated Rowland in the form of C&O No. 614, built by Lima in 1948 and displayed after retirement at the B&O Museum in Baltimore. Restored, No. 614 staged a tour as the Chessie Safety Express.

Dedicated to steam as a viable technology, he formed American Coal Enterprises with the goal of constructing a new locomotive called the ACE 3000. The project never got off the ground financially, but Rowland did run the 614 as a test bed, pulling CSX coal trains in 1985. — Kevin P. Keefe



▲ Rowland's final chapters as a steam entrepreneur involved C&O No. 614, which replaced the fire-damaged Reading No. 2101.

John B. Corns



AFTER A DOZEN YEARS AWAY as part of its restoration process, Chicago & North Western 4-6-0 No. 1385 was welcomed back to the Mid-Continent Railway Museum on July 12, 2025. Well-known for its travels throughout the Midwest in the 1980s and 1990s, the Alco built in 1907 has been out of service since 1998, but is projected to be back in operation in 2026. Lucas Iverson



TRIMET OF PORTLAND, ORE., has donated one of the LRVs that helped launch its MAX service in 1986 to the Oregon Electric Railway Museum in Brooks, Ore. No. 101 is one of 26 such first-generation trainsets built by Bombardier. Oregon Electric Railway Historical Society

PRESERVATION BRIEFS

Big Boy makes lone trip of 2025

UNION PACIFIC BIG BOY NO. 4014 made its only scheduled appearance of 2025 with a July 17-19 round trip between Cheyenne, Wyo., and Denver for the annual Cheyenne Frontier Days. The 4-8-8-4, accompanied by UP's diesel honoring Abraham Lincoln, made brief stops in Greeley, Colo., for servicing and public viewing in both directions. UP has said it plans a more extensive operating schedule in 2026.

Several notable excursions this fall were announced in July. They include: Trips behind **UNION PACIFIC DDA40X NO. 6936** from Silvis, Ill., on Sept. 20-21, to benefit nonprof-

it rail safety organizations and a group restoring two Chinese-built 2-10-2 locomotives; check the **RAILROADING HERITAGE OF MIDWEST AMERICA** website for details. **NORFOLK & WESTERN CLASS J NO. 611** returns to the Buckingham Branch Railroad for five weekends of excursions from Goshen, Va., beginning Sept. 26; details are at the **VIRGINIA SCENIC RAILWAY** website. And **MILWAUKEE ROAD 4-8-4 NO. 261** will make its first extended excursions since 2022 when it operates two "Holiday BBQ Express" trips on the Twin Cities & Western Railroad Oct. 4-5; information is at the **FRIENDS OF THE 261** website.

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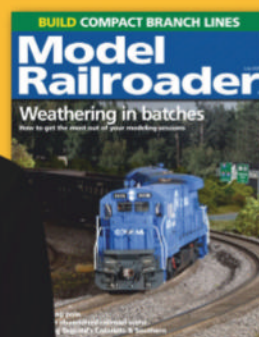
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RAIL SHOWS AND EVENTS

OCTOBER 11-12, 2025: 34th Annual Greater St. Louis Metro Area Train Show sponsored by Mississippi Valley N. Scalers. St. Louis Community College-Meramec Gym, Kirkwood, MO 63122. David Johnson, 636-225-2405. For more details, visit: <https://mvns.railfan.net>

OCTOBER 19, 2025: 34th Annual Chicago Railroadiana and Model Train Show and Sale. Kane County Fairgrounds, (Front Building), 525 South Randall Rd., St. Charles, IL 60174. Sunday, October 19, 2025, 10:00am-3:00pm. Admission: \$6.00 (includes tax). Children under 12 FREE. Tables starting at \$65.00. For information: 847-358-1185, RussFierce@aol.com or www.RRShows.com

All listed events were confirmed as active at the time of press. Please contact event sponsor for current status of the event.

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Commuter rail winners and losers

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Natural Beauty

An eastbound Norfolk Southern train led by a former Conrail SD50 is reflected in a flooded field. The scene is west of Clymers, Ind., on the former Wabash during a beautiful spring evening on April 29, 2011. John E. Troxler



Pocahontas

The headlight of an approaching train reflects off the girders of a truss bridge spanning Route 52 in Maybeury, W.Va., on Norfolk Southern's Pocahontas District on Nov. 4, 2016. Brandon Townley

Let It Shine

The reflectorized American flag decal on a Union Pacific locomotive on the Roseville-Redding turn catches light while stopped at the Redding, Calif., station on Feb. 15, 2014.

John Roskoski



See the Sky About to Rain

Norfolk Southern local P43,
with high-nose GP38-2
No. 5202 on the point,
spends the weekend tied
down near Gastonia, N.C.,
on Aug. 5, 2018, as a
thunderhead reflects the
setting sun. Will Jordan



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